

OUR RESPONSE TO THE DIVINE REALITY

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

Intro

You are about to face a moment of dwelling inside the minister's mind... in the days following Easter.

"Alrighty, what's the lectionary got for us today. John 20:19-31. Jesus appears to the disciples...Jesus and Thomas. Nope. I can't talk about Doubting Thomas this year: just not feeling it.

What else do we have? I Peter 1:3-9. Read, read, read. Yeah, not really feeling drawn to that either.

What's left? Acts 2. Well, it takes place on Pentecost...but maybe. Let's go with that one for now and see what happens".

Thank you for enduring this moment of dwelling inside the minister's mind...in the days following Easter...and you are about to see what happens!

The amazing and wonderful thing was, over the next few days there were things that took place that began to craft a point to what needed to be said.

Here's the long and the short of it: as people of faith, as children of the resurrection, there are responses that we are called to live out. As witnesses to the truth of Jesus Christ we are called, like David, who lived and died long before the human incarnation of Jesus ever breathed a breath, we are called to live out what we know, not just when it's convenient; not just when it's easy; not just when it's comfortable, but in all our days.

So the question is, how are you, as a witness to the resurrection (and the fact that you are here absolutely puts you in that category), how are you modeling your faith, not only to the world, but to your co-workers, your friends, your family, your kids, your spouse? We started to talk about this during the Easter service as well.

How are we responding to the invitation to live as sons and daughters of an eternal light? The scripture reads this way.

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them,

²² "You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—²³ this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. ²⁴ But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.

²⁵ For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; ²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope. ²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. ²⁸ You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'

²⁹ "Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹ Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.' ³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.

"Our Response to the Divine Reality"

Our kids are like sponges.

Sometimes this can be a good thing. Sometimes, well, let's just say that our kids aren't just soaking up the good stuff that we do.

For example, my son-in-law Eric and I will look at one another knowingly as Jen and Amanda will finish sentences the exact same way...with the exact same cadence. It is both remarkable and a little disturbing...all at the same time!

I think of Jim and the fact that he now has his driver's license and is able to get out on the road, and there have been more than a few occasions when I have thought as I have sat in the passenger's seat, "oh my gosh, he drove that the exact same way that I would have" (for the sake of the innocent (and the guilty) I am not going to say if that particular 'skill' was a good or a bad one).

And then there's Austin. Yes, he is more than willing to use words and phrases that he hears from his parents, but one of the areas where spongedom shows up the quickest is that he is all but a human GPS. We get to the light at the end of Broad Street and turn right and he will say, almost absent mindedly, 'I am so hungry...for pancakes' (because he knows that the diner that we frequent is just off the Somerville Circle. Turn north of 31 and he says, 'I am so hungry...for a milkshake' (because he knows that Gronsky's is up in High Bridge). You picking up on a theme here?

Don't tell me that we don't have an amazing influence on those who are around us, because I've got a special needs 11 year old asking for pancakes and milkshakes from his car seat that tells me different.

I don't know if Peter had the thought, "what is going to be said through me today is going to be an influence for Christians for the rest time."

My guess is that it wasn't.

However, the fact that we are here almost 2000 years later shows to me that what he said and did was incredibly influential, not just for the people who were listening on that first Pentecost, but for us here today.

And why was he influential?

Because he was willing to stand up for what he knew to be true. As he said at the end of the scripture that we heard, “This Jesus God raised up, ... of that all of us are witnesses.” He was a witness to the resurrection and he was willing to model for the generations of believers who were to follow how they should stand up and profess their belief. This was an expectation for all of the apostles, to go out “into the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that [Jesus had] commanded [them].” (Matthew 28:19-20a). Standing up and modeling their faith commitment was not optional, or something that could be done when easy or convenient: it was the necessary response to God as articulated through the Messiah, the one whom we worshipped but a few days ago as the one who was raised from the dead. Modeling faith was necessary.

Now when we have that sort of a lead in, many of you may be thinking that I’m going to plunge into the waters of, “be like Peter.” I’m not. None of us are Peter and to ask you to try and walk in his shoes and be the sort of influence to the world of Christendom that he always will be, is impossible.

However, that doesn’t mean that your influence, through the way that you model your faith, isn’t any less important. Your influence may not be upon the totality of the world, but it is on display for your co-workers, your friends and family, your children, your spouse, and that influence can be utterly profound.

What are some examples of faith-filled responses to a Divine reality? Well, here you go!

First off: prayer. Praying is one of those activities that scares most us to no end. We don’t know the words to say; we don’t how to get started; we don’t want to miss something or someone. It scares us so much that even dinner grace has been shrunk down to something that is regurgitated by rote. And I’m no exception: what we say around the table is God is great, God is good, let us thank Him for our food.

Now for kids, that sort of a prayer is fantastic, because it gets them offering thanks to God. But think about what that models to our children when that is, quite possibly, the only prayer that they hear us as adults, as parents, ever say. All of a sudden, prayer becomes something that only the minister, or someone elevated in the family structure says. Take dinner as an opportunity to model what your faith means to you.

In our house that means that the prayer responsibilities go all the way around the table. The other day (as Austin was still recuperating from the cold that he came down with at the end of Holy Week) it was Austin’s turn to pray and he literally included, ‘and thank you for all the ways that Mommy is helping to take care of me.’ Did he thank God for the food? Not really. Was it still ‘a great pray’? You bet.

Prayer is one of the faith-filled responses to a Divine reality: let's model it for ourselves and for all those around us.

Another avenue of modeling your faith is through your level of commitment.

I know our lives are busy, but we're the ones who set the priorities as to what gets done and what doesn't. There are too many of us who are modeling for the world a faith that comes to church on Sunday and is put to bed by early Sunday afternoon. One of the big reasons why the mainline church is struggling today is that it became satisfied with having members that showed up on Sunday mornings and that was it. Faith is so much more than what happens between 10:15 and 11:30.

Faith is finding ways to serve your neighbor when a need is expressed, even if that expression was not verbalized.

Faith is saying, "we're going to help out at the Soup Kitchen or go on the Mission Trip (and not head to this, that or the other thing) because service is not an option, it is a necessary response."

Faith is taking the time to attend a Bible Study, or read the Bible at home, because we know that in doing so, we have the opportunity to hear the voice of God speak to us in new and different ways. Commitment is a faith-filled response to a Divine reality: let's model it for ourselves and for all those around us.

If you're looking for another area, look no further than forgiveness. Our faith demands that we reach out beyond our comfort zone, and the biggest place that we get caught in the trap of settling into what is comfortable is in regards to forgiveness. I can't tell you the number of people, whom I consider to be good people, who won't talk to someone because of an unresolved dispute, because of the fact that forgiveness has not been offered. Or even worse, they will talk about how important forgiveness is when they're in circles of people of faith, but once their beyond those circles, well, then their life shows something completely different.

What sort of an example are we setting if we say that we are Christians and then we are unwilling to forgive those who have wronged us, or admit that we were wrong and offer our most sincere apologies? If we're not willing to forgive and confess so that we might have the opportunity to be forgiven, then what we're showing to those around us is that it's optional. It's not! Forgiveness for those who have wronged us, and owning up to our own sinful wrongs is a faith-filled response to a Divine reality: let's model it for ourselves and for all those around us.

There are way too many days when it feels like too many of us are taking our faith for granted, and using it like a commodity that can be bought or sold at our discretion, allowing it to appear when it's convenient and shoving it back into some corner when it doesn't fit the environment that we happen to be in. That is not the response that God has for us as we move beyond these walls out into the worlds of which we are a part. God expects us to model to those who are around us (our co-workers, our friends, our families, our kids, and our spouses) what it means to walk toward God.

If I have learned nothing else from having kids, I have learned how much they are paying attention and learning how to live because of how I live. I know that I have had those same sorts of thoughts as I have looked to other preachers and professionals whom I look up to: much of who I am is in response to some influence of modeling that I had.

I'm not saying that we're going to be perfect.

We're sinful creatures. We are going to fall short.

But even when we fall short we have the opportunity to model to those around us what it means to own up to what we have done and through confession, seek restoration. There are important responses that come along with your faith.

Peter knew this.

We know this.

As we talked about this morning, prayer, commitment, and forgiveness are three prominent places where we can begin to allow those necessary responses to develop into reality.

And they can be. We have the Lord God Almighty on our side. We can pray! We can set good priorities and stay committed to them! We can learn how to forgive (and be forgiven)! Strive to respond to the God who has shown such great love for all of us. Strive for them. Don't settle. Step out in faith and allow your faith to modeled to all those you know.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy and gracious God, as people who profess our belief in Your Son as the risen Christ, there are great expectations as to how we should live in the world. There have been days when we have responded the way that we should. There are others, many others, when we have not. We pray that Your Spirit might work in us to strive toward these necessary responses so that what we model to the world, to our children, is of You and You alone. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.