

General Presbyter's Report

April 30, 2013

Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed!

I just returned from Spain where I saw the Holy Week processions depicting scenes from Jesus' life during his last week and his resurrection. The processions are made up of huge floats, weighing between one and two tons, covered with gold and silver and with exquisite carvings of Jesus, the disciples, the Romans, and the Virgin Mary. The floats in Jesus' life were usually followed by a float featuring Mary in tears and surrounded by fifty to a hundred candles. Some of the carvings on these floats were completed as long ago as the seventeenth century. These large and beautiful floats are carried by forty or more men and they are hidden from view. These scenes depicted on these floats are huge - so tall that they can be seen easily by the hundreds and thousands of people gathered to watch. The entire experience was impressive, beautiful, dramatic and heart wrenching.

As I reflected on my experience that week, I realized these floats were another way of telling the story. In the days before everyone had the printed work and could read, they were the Christian education for the believers. Because they are so spectacular and beautiful these floats are now watched by believers and non-believers.

It caused me to reflect on how we tell the story, particularly when some people only hear about Palm Sunday and then Easter and some just know about the Easter bunny. I also reflected on the fact that as we use the Lectionary, we sometimes only tell the Holy Week story once a year. With our Holy Week, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday, we also are trying to tell the whole story. How do we help believers and non-believers connect to Holy Week and Christ's saving love?

This week I also participated in two funerals, celebrations of the resurrection. This was a strong connection for me with Holy Week. As we say of the deceased, this person has been buried with Christ in his death and will also be raised with him. The belief in Christ's death as our savior, and his resurrection, gives us comfort, hope, and joy. It permeates my living. How sad it is that everyone does not have the hope and joy of the resurrection.

How are we to share the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection with a world that does not understand? How do we help people see our hope and comfort in death? The early church had apologetics, people who try to frame our story in ways to help others understand. We need to learn today how to tell our story to a generation of people, many who do not know it or see any reason to listen. When I grew up, all the children I knew went to church to learn the story and to be presented with Christ's love and grace. There they had a chance to commit themselves to be in relationship with our Risen Lord. Today, we have the responsibility to learn how to tell the gospel, the good news, Christ's story to the people in our neighborhood and world.

How do we learn to do this? One way is to share our faith story and how God has worked in our lives with each other. This helps us reflect on our lives, what being in a relationship with God means to us and how God has been active in our lives.

Take time in a Sunday School class, in Session, in Women's circle, men's group, and Wednesday times to share. You will find this incredibly meaningful. Then, talk about how you can share this with your friends, your children and grandchildren. How can the church share it with its neighbors and the world in what they say and do? Often, it is our outreach that gives us a chance to demonstrate and tell the good news. How does your church family share this with people who do not just drop in to church anymore, but have to be invited ten to a hundred times before they come? How do you share the story with the folks that will not step inside a church?

In the Session, full of evangelists, people doing apologetics, and those of us that had reflected on how God has been present in our lives, we could be looking at how to share the hope and joy of the resurrection in new ways. As members, who have reflected on God's work in our lives and how God sends us all out as disciples, we too could be inviting, sharing and demonstrating God's great love. We are the body of Christ.

We are church members, evangelist, servants. *“Membership in the Church of Jesus Christ is a joy and a privilege. It is also a commitment to participate in Christ's mission. A faithful member bears witness to God's love and grace and promises to be involved responsibly in the ministry of Christ's Church.” (G-1.0304)*

On the day of Jesus' resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples in a locked room. Jesus said, "Peace be with you." Then he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Then he breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit. (John 20:19-22) We are the current "sent ones, apostles for our Lord."

Let us continue to celebrate: *Christ is Risen. Christ is Risen Indeed!*