**The Credibility of Resurrection**

Psalm 133
Acts 4:32-35

 There are cookie crumbs on the floor. There are cookie crumbs on her shirt. There are even a few stray cookie crumbs on the corner of her mouth. Dad comes up to his five year old daughter and asks, “did you take a cookie without asking?” Susie looks down, shaking her head, no, “I didn’t have any cookies.” Susie has a credibility problem. There is a fairly big discrepancy between what she is telling her dad and the trail of cookie crumbs descending from her mouth, down her shirt onto the floor.

 Although the Rolling Stone Magazine desires to be seen as a highly regarded and respected source of news, this past week the magazine retracted its articles about a brutal gang rape at a University of Virginia fraternity after the release of a report on Sunday that concluded the widely discredited piece was the result of failures at every stage. The Columbia Graduate School of Journalism said the magazine failed to engage in “basic, even routine journalistic practices.” Rolling Stone has a credibility problem. There is significant discrepancy between the magazine’s commitment to journalistic integrity and the article they published about a gang rape at the University of Virginia. There are cookie crumbs on the floor.

 The automobile manufacturer Chrysler includes in its mission statement this promise “to create the type of exciting, efficient, reliable safe vehicles you expect and deserve”. Unfortunately for Chrysler a number of folks are asking how the exploding gas tanks of their Jeeps and Chrysler’s delayed response fit with their mission. According to automotive news, “A top safety regulator has called the slow pace of repairs “woeful” and demanded that executives do more.” Chrysler has a credibility problem. Exploding gas tanks are at odds with reliable and safe. There are cookie crumbs on the floor.

 If you go to Secret Service.gov this is what you will read “The mission of the Secret Service is to ensure the security of our President, our Vice President, their families, the White House, the Vice President’s Residence, national and visiting world leaders, former Presidents, and events of national significance”. One does wonder how that mission coincides with a man gaining access to the White House through a back door after jumping the fence, top agents allegedly drunk plowing their car into a White House barricade, Secret Service agents caught with prostitutes in Colombia, just to name a few incidents in recent months. The nation’s Secret Service has the same dilemma as the five year old girl. They have a credibility problem. There are cookie crumbs on the floor.

 The early Christian Church knows that when it comes to the promise of Resurrection they have a serious credibility problem.

They are followers of One who begins his ministry with a clear statement of mission and identity. Luke tells us, Jesus mission is articulated in his hometown of Nazareth when Jesus states what his calling is about, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the Year of the Lord’s Favor”. The later is a Biblical image for God’s economic justice plan in which all people share in the abundance of this earth.

 Initially, everyone, including the disciples, believes the mission of God’s justice plan for the world was crushed by the power of Rome when Jesus was executed on the cross. But, little by little the awareness begins emerging among the followers of Jesus that Jesus is still present among us. They call it Resurrection and it means for those early Christians, the Realm of God’s justice movement begun by Jesus is still at work. These Christians are saying God’s love is greater than all the powers of our world seeking to crush the love and justice of God. Resurrection is God’s assurance that as the Apostle Paul says, *neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+8%3A38-39" \l "fen-NIV-28155a" \o "See footnote a)]neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,****39****neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 8:38, 39). The Realm of God is present, resurrection is at work, new life is possible for us and for our world.

 Unfortunately, for the early church, there is a credibility problem with the resurrection. Other people are asking if resurrection is real, if God has raised Jesus from the dead, if God’s Realm is at work, than how come Rome is still in power? There are cookie crumbs on the floor. If resurrection is real, how come people are still being hung on the cross? Jesus was far from the first and far from the last to be executed in this brutal way. There are cookie crumbs on the floor. If Jesus’ resurrection is real how come people are still suffering from illness, hunger, and death? If resurrection is real how come I continue to face the struggles I face? There are cookie crumbs on the floor. There is a big discrepancy between your resurrection promise about God’s love and justice and the reality of our lives and world.

 The church faces the same resurrection credibility problem today. If the resurrection is real, why does my loved one have cancer? If the resurrection is real, why are black men being shot in the back by police officers? If resurrection is real, why are young women being raped on college campuses? If resurrection is real, why is my son suffering from depression? If resurrection is real why is there so much bad news? There is a discrepancy between the reality of our lives and the resurrection assurance that the Realm of God mission begun by Jesus is still at work in our lives and world. There are cookie crumbs on the floor.

 One response often found in the church is to ignore all those cookie crumbs, maintaining the resurrection has nothing to do with cleaning up the mess in our world. The problems of this world are essentially irrelevant, because the promise of resurrection is limited to what happens when we die. By believing the right things about Jesus, you will be offered a resurrected life with God after you die. When my children were little and we would be walking through a store, they would often see some new shiny object or treat and they would ask, can I have it? My response was, some day. It seemed to work for my kids and it seems to work for many Christians. Someday, resurrection will be real.

But for those of us, like the early church, who believe resurrection is God’s resounding yes to the mission Jesus began in Nazareth, there is no ignoring the cookie crumb messes in our world and the credibility problems they create. Luke tells us, rather than deny the mess in our world or see all those cookie crumbs as evidence resurrection has no credibility, the early Christians instead say to people, come and see for yourself what our life is like together.

Listen again to how Luke describes the early Christian church,

“Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them..” Does resurrection have credibility for our lives now, as Jesus promises, or is it merely a promise for someday? The early Christians response is to let resurrection find its credibility in their lives together. When we build community, care for one another, support one another in time of need, encourage one another, extend radical hospitality, we give credibility to the promise of resurrection. When we are generous with our own resources, together advocate for justice, together do our part in cleaning up the cookie crumbs scattered on the floor, we give credibility to the resurrection power of God at work in our world.

 Years later, Mahatma Ghandi, a Hindu, who took seriously the mission embraced by Jesus of Nazareth, said this, “be the change you wish to see in the world”. The early Christian community knows that it is there calling, as it is our calling to be the resurrection God promises in Jesus Christ. Be the resurrection. With the power of God’s spirit, live the resurrection.

Tomorrow night we will be holding a forum entitled “Challenging the Biblical Narratives of Genocide.” In this forum we will take an honest look at uncomfortable verses in the Bible which speak about God calling for the slaughter of entire communities, men, women and children. We will look honestly at how those passages have been used to justify genocide against the Dakota and Ojibwe people in Minnesota. Be the resurrection. Live the resurrection.

 To be sure, even in the church, there is a little of that five year old girl in all of us. We find ourselves doing and saying things that undermine the credibility of resurrection. Anyone who has been a member of a congregation for any period of time knows that we have our own share of cookie crumb messes. Sometimes those crumbs are even stuck to our shirt, or hanging from the corner of our mouths. And like that five year old girl, we sometimes have a hard time being honest about the things we do. But that is why we have forgiveness, to clean up those messes and start again. We can seek each other out in a spirit of healing so that we might be of one heart and one soul. We turn to God with the assurance of forgiveness, knowing no matter how many cookies we have taken or messes we have made, there is nothing that separates us from the love of God.

 Does resurrection have credibility? It is a question we are called to answer every day.

**Psalm 133**

*In our first lesson we are reminded by the Psalmist that it is through living in unity that we give witness to the blessings offered to us by God.*

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, upon the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there God ordained the blessing, the blessing of life forevermore.

**Acts 4:32-35**

*Our first lesson tells the story of the early Christian church. They are making the surprising, even disturbing claim that the intent of Rome and religious leaders to crush Jesus and the promise of new life, has been overturned by the resurrection power of God. Many are asking what evidence do you have for this claim? The early church has a answer.*

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.