

Sermon for Easter Day

Year C

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A few weeks ago there was a buzz about a new documentary that claimed to reveal a collection of ancient bones and burial chests from the family of Jesus. The collection purportedly included the bones of Jesus himself, something that would have made our Easter story doubtful. A few years ago Antonio Banderas starred in a perfectly awful movie that was based on the same premise, during which another middle eastern war began to prevent the archaeologists publishing their discovery, and in which the abbot of the seminary through himself off the bell tower in despair. It was one of those movies I watched to the very end because I couldn't believe it was really as bad as it seemed to be.

Many scholars chimed in to repudiate the evidence on which the recent documentary was based, but for the most part it didn't matter to very many people. Anything as ancient as 2000 year old bones will provide fairly thin evidence for anything as precise as an individual's identity. Those who are committed to believing the Jesus story is false still believe that. Those committed to believing the Jesus story is true still believe that.

Let me assume, for the most part, that this gathering of those who are committed to believing the Jesus story is true. For us, the resurrection of Jesus is the key moment in human history. It is key for us because it does four key things.

First is that it gives us a new way of thinking about life itself. All of a sudden the notion of a distinction between death and life gets muddled. The one who was dead is alive. Death and Life are no longer distinctive states of being, and so our faith claims that death is but a gateway to new life. If Jesus reappears fully alive in spite of dying, it makes all of life itself a mystery and a remarkable gift. It is no longer the case merely that our bodies live, but that somehow our bodies take advantage of life energy that is greater than cells that make us up.

Second, the resurrection requires us to take with complete seriousness the teaching of Jesus. If Jesus is the one to show us how to tune in to this resurrection life, then we need to take seriously what he says about finding and losing life.

Third, the resurrection reminds us that life is not a nine inning game. Life, after all, always goes extra innings. That creates a new way of thinking about how to live and about the values by which we live. If you use up all your pitchers by the ninth inning, or substitute all your hitters for pinch runners, the extra innings will be hampered and not much fun. In other words, don't rack up enemies in this life, thinking that you'll never meet them again. You will. Don't cheat people or mistreat people as if it won't matter in the future. It will.

Finally, the resurrection gives us permission to live with unbridled Joy. Joy is different than happiness. Happiness is an emotion, a state of feeling good. Joy is an attitude of confidence that a happy ending is a sure thing. People who confuse joy and happiness feel guilty when they are sad or hurting. Happiness comes and goes. Joy is a state of certainty that God, and you will be victorious in the end.

So I wish you a joyful Easter, the kind of Easter that gives you the kind of confidence and hope to live your life fully and without limit all your days. Amen.