

Sunday, April 19, 2015
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Delivered at Bridgeport UCC

Sermon – “Living Resurrection”

Grace and peace to you from your covenant partners at Salisbury Congregational Church.

I bring you Easter greetings from the northwest corner.

It brings me great joy to be here among you today as we celebrate resurrection and all of the possibilities that it brings.

Resurrection, for me, is not about something that happens after death.

Resurrection is a way of living, a way of life.

One author put it this way: “Resurrection is a challenge to everything that brings death into our world, and a call for all people to live differently – in ways that bring life to others.”

This is an attitude that we can adopt in our lives today.

One of the beautiful things about the promises of Jesus is that we don’t have to wait until we die to realize them.

We are invited to live as Easter people, people who believe in resurrection each and every day.

We have the ability to create God’s kingdom right here, right now, with our own actions.

This very church – United Congregational Church – has lived through its own resurrection – right?

You have been living witnesses to the possibilities that are alive when you open yourselves to God’s spirit moving among you.

The vitality of this church is a living witness to the power of people acting in ways that are life-giving.

This morning’s reading gives us an intimate look into the life of the disciples – sort of a reality tv episode from 2000 years ago.

The disciples are locked in a room in Jerusalem, fearing for their lives.

The authorities have murdered their leader and they have no idea what to do next.

They have just heard the report from two disciples who were travelling out of town when Jesus seemed to join them on their journey – even sitting down to dinner with them.

When he took the bread, blessed it and broke it – “their eyes were opened and they recognized him.”

How do they make sense of that?

Now into their midst Jesus comes and stands and offers them peace.

“Peace be with you.”

Peace is a powerful gift to give another person.

To be at peace means to be without fear, without discomfort, without worry.

Jesus next invites the disciples to “touch me and see.”

When we touch another person we are sharing our humanity.

Skin to skin.

Whether a handshake or a hug – touch signifies connection, awareness.

It says, “I am alert to your presence.”

“You exist.”

“I see you.”

The next thing Jesus does is to ask for something to eat.

By eating with the disciples he signifies his oneness.

Every person must eat.

Regardless of who you are or what your station in life, every person must eat.

Throughout Jesus’ ministry he used the sharing of meals as a symbol of the importance of reaching out to others.

At his last meal with his disciples he chose the bread and the wine, elements that he knew they would encounter every day, and infused them with the idea that they would serve as a way to remember him.

“Every time you eat this bread or drink this wine, remember me.”

Henri Nouwen points out that “We all need to eat and drink to stay alive.

But having a meal is more than eating and drinking.

It is celebrating the gifts of life we share.

A meal together is one of the most intimate and sacred human events.

Around the table we become vulnerable, filling one another's plates and cups and encouraging one another to eat and drink.

Much more happens at a meal than satisfying hunger and quenching thirst.

Around the table we become family, friends, community, yes, a body.

The body of Christ.”

I see these three elements all present in the life of this church and in the work we are doing together.

First, the offer of peace.

Goodness and kindness and peace are free!

We can give away an infinite supply of each.

We are also recipients of an abundant supply.

It need not be limited or rationed.

You never need to say, “Oh, no thank you, no more kindness for me today – I’m full.”

Perhaps it sounds cliche to say “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.”

But why not?

What is keeping you from working toward peace in your heart, in your home and in this world?

“Touch me and See.”

This is one of the things that this congregation excels at.

Every time you offer a bed, a meal, a coat, a handshake, a hug you are letting someone touch and see the goodness of God’s love.

I have participated in several service trips through Simply Smiles – twice to Oaxaca, Mexico and once to the Sioux River Cheyenne Reservation in South Dakota.

Each time the founder of Simply Smiles, Bryan Nurnberger told us – “Your presence here matters. It says to the people who live here that you notice them, you care about them, your time is worth being here.”

I have heard similar words from Reverend Sara addressing the volunteers from our church who come to help out with the *Feel the Warmth* dinners.

“Your presence is a gift.”

Again, it doesn't cost a thing to notice someone, to look them in the eye, to smile, to gently touch their arm.

“Have you anything here to eat?” Jesus asked his stunned disciples.

Someone scrambled and came up with a piece of broiled fish.

Again, Jesus reveals himself in the sharing of a common meal, just as you reveal yourselves – the Jesus in you – every Thursday night when you share a meal with your neighbors.

The gift of God's grace is made manifest in our lives in a myriad of different ways.

The challenge for us, as followers of Christ, is to celebrate our own gifts and to discern ways to share them with others.

Maybe you have the gift for singing, so you sing with the choir to enrich everyone's worship experience.

Maybe you have a gift for organizing, so you volunteer to sift through all of the clothing donations and put them in order.

Maybe relationship building is your strength, so you are the person who sits by the door and greets every stranger who walks into this church.

The reward for using all of our God-given-gifts here in our earthly life is that we get to live in a community that cares, that notices, that loves.

We get to live in God's kingdom now – not after death, not only in eternity, but right now.

The kingdom is ours to make.

“When we allow Christ's message and mission to change us, shifting us away from behaviors and attitudes that bring pain, darkness and division into our neighborhoods and communities, we will find ourselves moving toward generosity, peace-making, inclusivity, service, and advocacy for justice.”

Resurrection is about living in such a way that we bring life and love to others.

My friends, I am honored to be here, to speak words of love and hope to you.

I invite you to join me in praying for a world that embraces the teachings of Jesus Christ.

I don't mean that everyone needs to be Christian, but what a glorious world it would be if everyone – regardless of race, religion, class, nationality, sexuality, age or beliefs greeted their neighbor by saying, “Peace be with you.”

For this I pray.

Amen.

Let us pray.

Gracious and loving God we are grateful for the gifts you have bestowed upon us.

Grant us the grace, we pray, to be peacemakers in our communities.

Help us to notice our neighbors, to reach out a gentle hand to those in need.

O God, you have led us to this place to nurture our faith and to nourish our souls.

Help us to be tender and loving as Jesus was with his disciples.

Hear our prayers this day for those whom we love.

For those who are sick, we pray for healing.

For those who are mourning, we pray for comfort.

For those without shelter, food or community, we pray that our love might transform their lives.

We are grateful for the opportunity to serve you and ask that you hear now the silent prayers of our hearts....

Amen.