
Radio Resurrection

**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler
Atlanta, Georgia
The Second Sunday After Christmas**

*O God, who wonderfully created,
and yet more wonderfully restored,
the dignity of human nature....*

--From the Collect for the Second Sunday after Christmas,
Episcopal Book of Common Prayer

I have a confession to make!

I did not attend any parish worship service last Sunday. (Actually, I like to attend church when I am away from Atlanta for any sort of vacation. I enjoy worshiping in various congregations.)

But this past Sunday, I listened to the competition. The competition is all the other possibilities that await folks when we do not go to church. The real competition to church is the Sunday newspaper, an extra cup of coffee, the golf course, the football game. You know what the competition is!

Last Sunday, I was on the beach, and listening to the radio. And the broadcast was a fascinating one. I heard a secular program which sounded remarkably like church. The host interviewed a man who was once a minister and who now is an expert on the making of bread. The two agreed that bread is actually a sign of resurrection. The flour, water, and salt make only a lump of clay, but the addition of yeast actually resurrects bread; it gives it life. The flour was once wheat and alive. Then, it dies; but it is resurrected as succulent bread. The same thing goes for wine, the two good folks said.

I was listening to a Sunday sermon on a secular Sunday radio show! And so the question lunged at me: Why was this show on the radio, for folks who were not at church on Sunday? Folks like me, not at church, were learning about resurrection on the radio instead.

I believe that there's a reason for this. I believe that much of the Church has forgotten how to be Christian. We actually do not like resurrection. We do not like new life. We do not like people or things being born again. This is why we scatter and flee.

Listen to the story from Jeremiah 31.10 for today. God, having scattered the chosen people, will yet reclaim and gather again the people of God. People are scattered, but there will be new life. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

The prayer that we use for the Second Sunday after Christmas, the collect of the day, is one of my favorites. "O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity." God creates, and also restores the dignity of human nature. This is part of the mystery of Christmas itself; God becomes flesh and so restores the wholeness of human nature; God blesses

humanity itself.

Why does God have to restore the dignity of human nature? Because we always trash the dignity of human nature. It is our tendency to waste. It is God's tendency to save. God is in the business of resurrection and new life.

The ultimate and distinguishing feature of Christianity is resurrection, new life, change and being born again. There are plenty of religions who give us law and order. And Christianity gives us law and order, too. We definitely need that. But the distinguishing feature is new life. Christianity changes us. Christianity appears in our lives whenever we go through change, and especially when we go through unwanted change!

Listen to the gospel for today, the gospel for the Second Sunday after Christmas. It is the story of the young boy Jesus going to the temple. Why do we have that story in the gospels?

Do you realize that we have no stories of Jesus' childhood in the gospels, except this one? Why this one? Because this is the story of Jesus as an adolescent. This is the story of Jesus at twelve years old. He is changing. Jesus is coming of age.

We need to hear how Jesus himself goes through change. We parents hate adolescence. We have raised our cute and beautiful little children for twelve endearing years. They were like kids to us, pliable and adjustable and cuddly and warm. When they are about twelve -or whatever the age is now- they go through change.

We adults hate change, especially when we have spent twelve years developing a perfect of image of ourselves in our own children.

This story is in the Bible because Jesus upsets his parents. "Didn't you know that we would be worried," ask the parents. "Why have you treated us like this? We are anxious!" Don't these words sound familiar to parents of adolescents?

And Jesus responds, "Didn't you know that I am following someone else now?" Didn't you know that I am following someone else now? I am leaving your tutelage. You were wonderful, and kind, and well-intentioned. In fact, God gave you to me. God gave me to you as well. We can both rejoice in that. But at adolescence, Jesus grows up and begins to focus his attention somewhere else.

It is the heartbreak of every parent. It breaks our hearts. We are angry, depressed, and afraid.

And we parents are forced to grow up as well. We are forced to enter a second adolescence ourselves. We grow into a new maturity. We are forced, again, to rely not on ourselves, but on God.

This is exactly what Jesus told his parents. "Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?" Jesus was turning to God, and essentially the young Jesus was urging his parents to follow that course, too.

Whether we like it or not, Christianity is about change. Christianity is about change, but never change for its own sake. With all the crazy actions and reactions of the Episcopal Church in the past year, much as been said about change in the Episcopal Church. Believe me, if the Episcopal Church changes, it is not about changing for change's sake. We change for God's sake. Any change for something other than God's sake is backwards.

Christianity is about resurrection and new life. Christianity is about change, so that we can be thrust back into the loving arms of God.

When the Church forgets how to change, then the Church will die. When the Church forgets how to change, over and over again, into the likeness of God, then the Church will die.

As I listened to an engaging radio show about bread and resurrection last Sunday, I realized that there are two reasons why folks stop attending church. One is the church's fault, and the other is people's fault. The first reason, the Church's fault, is that Churches stop teaching people how to change gracefully. Churches stop teaching resurrection, stop teaching change, stop teaching how to be born again. When churches stop teaching that, people stop attending church, and you know what?

Radio shows start teaching resurrection instead!

The second reason, the people's fault, is that we ourselves don't want to change. We also resist churches who are teaching resurrection and change and new life. We'd rather have museums, where we sense that reality is locked into one special time and place. (Maybe that's why museums are also a big draw on Sundays!)

Christianity is about change. It is about being reborn into the image of God. It is about being reborn, again and again, into the dignity of human nature.

I like the observance of the New Year, because the calendar itself gives us a chance to renew ourselves, to make new resolutions, to start things over again. The Christian Church should be all for that! But our claim is even bigger than a new year. Our God has restored the dignity of human nature in the incarnation of Jesus Christ "for all time. So, we have an opportunity to enter that resurrection and restoration every day of our lives - not just once a year, but every week, and, indeed, every day.

It is one thing to listen and learn about resurrection on the radio, hearing about bread recipes and wine fermentation. It is altogether more dramatic and wonderful to be at Church, with the people of God, tasting that bread and wine. It may be more difficult, I know, just like making bread is more difficult than reading about it.

But let's do it. Let's roll. Let's roll out that dough, together, and make some delicious bread this year. Let's ferment some new wine. God is changing us, changing us into a community of new life and resurrection. O God, grant that we may share the divine life of Jesus himself, who humbled himself to share our humanity.

AMEN.

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