

The Controversy Continues

Our current political climate is a strong reminder to those of us who claim and profess belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior that life is constantly challenged by controversy, debate, the search for the truth. It is normal to live with more questions than answers. Life is filled with questions, with controversies, with conflict. Even Mother's Day can be a complicated, confusing celebration. And so, included in our worship bulletin and printed announcements is a long prayer that expresses the strong feelings this day can generate.

Easter, the celebration of Jesus' resurrection, gives us no easy answers. What we proclaim is Jesus' victory over death; Love is stronger than death. We believe this because of how the Christian movement grew and changed the world. We believe in this new life because we have experienced new life- physically, spiritually. We are here today because of our faith – a faith that surpasses the controversies of the past and of the present.

Each of the Four Gospels contains an end to the story of Jesus' resurrection that allows us to make our own judgements, our own decisions, based upon faith, our belief, not upon factual proof. The Gospel writers tell us about the fear, the silence, the doubt, the controversy that clouds the event we call the Resurrection. There are no easy answers in the Gospels to help us in our questions about how Jesus rose from the dead, why he rose from the dead.

What we find is belief, faith, a power coming from the Holy Spirit, God's gift through Jesus to men and women who carry Jesus' Way of Love to the world. Jesus told his disciples, "As the Father has sent me to the world, so I send you to the world ... As I have loved you, so you must love one another ..." The work Jesus did in healing, in loving, in teaching is the work we are to do as his Disciples. This work of love is how we are to deal with whatever is the controversy of the day. This work makes clear our position on every question, every debate. That's why many have simply asked "What would Jesus do?" Jesus tried to teach his disciples this way of love during his life and in those 40 mysterious days of his resurrection.

Our Gospel reading for today goes back to his ministry before his death and resurrection and shows us Jesus teaching when once again challenged by the Jewish religious authorities. "Tell us, are you the Messiah?"

Jesus gives three responses to answer them: 1. My works testify to me. John already has told us about six of these works, signs, miracles including healings, feeding the 5000, and changing water to wine. In a few verses, John gives us the last of the "works", healing Lazarus from the dead.

2. Then Jesus says, twice, no one will "snatch" his sheep from him. God's love through Jesus' life will build a community that cannot just deal with controversy. This community of the faithful will triumph over every evil. We have seen this in the history of our world for the last 2,000 years.

3. Finally, Jesus tells the Jewish leaders, "the Father and I are one." He means that his work is the Father's work. His love is the Father's love. Jesus' teaching is a perfect revelation of the truth from the One God, Creator of All. Easter shows us this perfect union between the love of the Creator and the love of Jesus.

Is it any wonder that in the very next verse, verse 31, not included in today's Gospel reading, that John tells us, "the Jews took up stones again to stone Jesus..."?

The controversy surrounding Jesus in his life, surrounds him during the resurrection appearances. This debate about Jesus continues in every age. We live in the controversies of today. How we respond, what we do, our life in the Church is our response to the doubt, the fear, the hatred, the indifferences, the opposition, we experience always.

So we try to live into our baptismal promises. We continue to celebrate the Great Commission to go, to make disciples, baptize and teach them all that we have learned from Jesus, risen from the dead. In the words of the old hymn, we try to "follow and obey for there is no other way..."