

Saturday, April 14, 2018

We Proclaim Resurrection in This Place

The Rev. Joseph Duggan

*Spirit of the Living God Fall Fresh On Us!
Congregation repeats!*

For the disciples to see Jesus in the breaking bread everything else had to first happen.

Jesus said to the disciples, "that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled."

The disciples were not seeing a ghost!
The disciples were not practicing magical thinking.

The disciples' minds were opened through the resurrection.

To experience the resurrection the disciples had to be willing to not only follow Jesus in his public ministry but also follow him to the cross and to his death. Yes they had to accept the finality of their journey and then their eyes were opened.

We here at Saint Francis have faithfully followed Jesus in his public ministry. We have gone to the cross and even have surrendered our common life here in this place so that our minds could be opened up to resurrection.

Saint Francis Church is and always has been at its core a resurrection parish. The service bulletin cover has a picture of the resurrected Christ that hung over our former Columbarium.

At every time in the life of this congregation the people of Saint Francis have relentlessly sung their resurrection Alleluias. Even at times of great loss and during times of steep challenges the people of Saint Francis sang their Alleluias!

The people of Saint Francis have never been content with the BCP single or double "Alleluia". We sing Alleluia three times with shameless conviction!

In this and other ways too the Emmaus story is our story here at Saint Francis.

The Risen Christ stands here among all of us this day and says "Peace be with you".

Peace be with you people of Saint Francis, good and faithful servants of the Gospel, instruments of peace.

Peace be with you all our outreach partners.

Peace be with you our brothers and sisters in Christ of Valley Redemptive Church.

Peace be with you choirs of angels and all in the communion of saints who once were nourished at this table with the Body and Blood of Christ.

Peace be with you congregations of the EDNC who will in the weeks and months ahead receive as new members the faithful people of Saint Francis.

Peace be with you Bishop and the whole diocese who this day stand with us to comfort the people of this parish and pastorally send all of us to continue to give glory to God.

Even surrounded by the Risen Christ's peace, the disciples were distraught, still wondering, still doubtful, still anxious, still grieving. The people of Saint Francis' know well the way of the disciples' feelings as their feelings ebb and flow with surrender, joy and felt loss too.

Yes the Lord stands before us on this day and in this place. These are not words of centuries ago, but real words of comfort for all of us this day.

Jesus among us has served over and over a feast at this table and in this place.

The members of this Body have continued in the public ministry of the Risen Christ in offering the Feast.

Among our most public and far-reaching ministries for 60 years Saint Francis has continued the Emmaus ministry of showing the wounds of Jesus and the compassion of the Risen Christ in the Breaking of the Bread.

Letters of gratitude have been coming in to us for months attesting to the transformation of lives that has taken place here on this campus.

For over 30 years recovery groups have been meeting on this campus. When Saint Francis Church began this work and opened its doors people in recovery were not welcomed anywhere else. So many recovery group members have reported to us the way their lives have been healed through this place.

Saint Francis Church has been a vessel that channeled God's love and grace. The people of Saint Francis created an occasion for God's grace to flow so that thousands of men and women in recovery would recognize that "It is He, the Lord."

The military spirit of inclusion that every serviceperson's religion has a service and chaplain infused this congregation with an ecumenical spirit and openness. Ecumenical relationships have been practiced in this place for decades. Pastor Scott Guemmer, our Lutheran neighbor shared a special friendship with Pastor Marcia and later with me. It was no surprise then that when the Saint Francis Church Center began to share space with other congregations that these were diverse to include Presbyterians, Baptists, evangelicals and the Christian Community movement of Rudolf Steiner.

Over the last two years our relationship with Pastor Bryant and his congregation of Valley Redemptive has built upon not only an ecumenical spirit but also a multi-racial spirit. Our two congregations have dared to live among each other as a sign of the unifying love of God during times in our nation and community of suspicion and even hatred across racial lines.

These ministries are a part of the legacy of Saint Francis Church and also are seeds that will continue to grow ministry beyond the walls of this church. The death and resurrection of Christ is not our story alone but for all of us in relationship through the Body of Christ.

All here in this place has experienced or one day will experience the loss of a beloved ministry and maybe even a beloved community that once was sacred to them. One day the ministry you are doing in a particular place will end and the Lord of Hosts will send you somewhere else. All here in this place will experience the way the life of Christ continues through each of us as we witness to the power of resurrection and unending life. Finality and resurrection are intertwined with one another. This place is sacred and important to all of us.

And at the same time this place is not the central event of our Christian life.

At its best this place has been a vehicle of Christ's grace and love.

This place is not the Risen Christ nor is this place the central event of our Christian life.

The central event of our Christian life is knowing, loving and serving the Lord wherever we find ourselves on our life journey with God.

It is oh so easy to cling to a ministry in the place we know and love. The ministry and love of the Risen Christ is greater than any one place. We must cling only to the Risen Christ. Even the finality of death and the closing of a church cannot hold back the power of the Risen Christ's resurrection.

In this way the ministry and love of the Risen Christ knows no end in the closing of this church. Our life in the Risen Christ continues as it did for those first disciples.

We all know but always must be reminded that unless a grain of wheat falls and dies it remains only a single seed. But if it dies it produces many seeds.

Saint Francis' life as a church has come to an end. This church is closing with the dignity of the Risen Christ, but it is not the end of our ministry or the Christ story. The closing of this church leaves many seeds where new life is taking root and will continue to take root in ways that we cannot know or narrate today.

Yes today is the last day of worship at Saint Francis Church, but today is not the end of the ministry of the Risen Christ through the members of Saint Francis Church.

The recovery groups that have met here for 30 years are all now meeting in other places across Sacramento including our largest group at Trinity Folsom.

The Education for Ministry program that started to meet here at Saint Francis a few years ago will meet at St. George's.

The anti-racism work done in this place will continue. The hymn "We All Bleed The Same" that you will hear later in the service represents one of the powerful seeds that will come out of the life of this place even as we close. Each of us will carry with us a seed when we walk out these doors today – a seed for new life with abundant hope in the power of the Risen Christ.

Yes this small parish, even in the course of its decline, even today is sowing seeds of resurrection. All the seeds are now in the Potter's hands. We have learned even as a small parish the Potter uses even the smallest of mustard seeds to grow amazing results.

These witnesses of the Risen Christ will continue to give glory to God through new ministries. The Lord no doubt has great things in mind for the people of Saint Francis. God's glory will continue as God's grace continues to pour out onto God's people. As this grain of wheat dies in this place the whole church grows and rises to a new creation due to the people of Saint Francis Church courage to go to the cross, die and be open to resurrection.

There is no other pathway to the resurrection then for a grain of wheat to fall and die. It is the only way that the disciples were able to recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread. They recognized Jesus after resurrection because they had accompanied him in his ministry, to the cross, emptying themselves so that their minds could be opened to resurrection.

The Good News is that the Lord is Risen and we are with Christ on a journey that continues on until our lives have been fulfilled in the Risen Christ.

God Bless You!