

10-11 #23

The Outcome of Your Faith

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

Psalm 16

John 20:19-31

1 Peter 1:3-9

3Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

6In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, 7so that the genuineness of your faith – being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, 9for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

This sermon today was already going to be a mix of joy and sorrow, with the wedding of Will and Catherine, and then the devastating losses in 7 southern states as a result of the tornados. It was to be a sermon on the hope that faith in a risen Christ gives us. But it is all the more meaningful now that we hear of the loss of your dear former pastor, Terry Reister.

His passing at this time seems somehow poetic. He died not on Easter Day, but the night before the second of six Sundays in Eastertide. He is a witness to the message of the whole season – that, we “are receiving the outcome of [our] faith, the salvation of [our] souls.”

Adam Hamilton, a Methodist pastor wrote on the devastation from the tornadoes last Wednesday and imagined what various pastors would preach about today. He wrote, “I suspect many of these pastors will remind their parishioners that just days before the tornadoes, they had celebrated Easter and on that day they had celebrated the fact that neither evil, nor suffering, nor even death will ever have the final word – not in Jesus’ life nor in ours. On the third day Jesus arose. His resurrection proclaims that, in the words of Frederick Buechner, ‘the worst thing is never the last thing.’”

Officially this is Quasimodogeniti – the ‘Octave of Easter’. It may refer either to the eight day period (Octave) from Easter Sunday until the Sunday following Easter, inclusive; or it may refer only to that Sunday after Easter, the Octave Day of Easter (sometimes known as Low Sunday). That Sunday is also known historically as St. Thomas Sunday (especially among Eastern Christians), Quasimodo Sunday and Quasimodogeniti. (Wikipedia). It may interest you to know that the famous fictional character, the Hunchback of Notre Dame, was named Quasimodo because he was discovered left at the famous cathedral on this day in the church cycle.

But all of that aside, this day we gather together, feeling slightly spiritually hung over from the Holy Week and Easter Sunday experiences, and we contemplate what this day means. This is the first of 6 Sundays each with its own focus on the resurrection of Jesus.

Donald Miller wrote in his book, *Blue Like Jazz: Non-religious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality* about his conversion into liking jazz. "I never liked jazz music because jazz music doesn't resolve. But I was outside the Bagdad Theatre in Portland one night when I saw a man playing the saxophone. I stood there for fifteen minutes and he never opened his eyes. After that I like jazz music. Sometimes you have to watch somebody love something before you can love it yourself. It is as if they are showing you the way."

When we hear Peter in our text today saying, "Although you have not seen him, you love him," we can understand what Miller was referring to, and perhaps understand more what this day can mean for us. We focus on learning to trust this "newly found" Messiah – even though we cannot witness him physically today. We see others who love this Christ and how it has changed their lives, and we witness to the changes in our lives through the trust we give to this Son of God, and we learn to love it ourselves.

This is also called Doubting Thomas Sunday – because it is the Sunday when we consider the part of the Gospel where Thomas doubts the witness of others and Christ appears where they and Thomas are and says, "'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'"

Overcoming doubt, trusting that last Sunday wasn't just some fluke – it wasn't just a one time thing . . . these things take time. So we contemplate those witnesses that came before. Peter was witnessing to those in the temple from the first reading (which wasn't the Old Testament, by the way, sorry about that typo). He was clarifying to all what was going on with them when they had been given the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We have all been witnessed to by various people in our lives from whom we have learned to love the Jazz that is our Christ. And Terry Reister was one of them. I would like to open up the floor at this time for people to share, if they can and want – one thing which Terry witnessed to you about this life of Christ. My hope is that we can all recall one moment when we heard or witnessed Terry and felt that through him we have come to love Christ better, and share this right now.