

Sermon Proper 5 Year A, 2026; Gospel Matthew 9: 9-13, 18-26

In the name of God the Creator, the Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

To Stand With Dignity

So where are we in Matthew's gospel? A lot has happened. There's the wonderful birth narrative, the visit of the three Magi, the demonic King Herod with his decree and the massacre of the innocent children, the escape of Joseph and Mary and the baby Jesus to Egypt, and their return home. He has grown from a child into a man. Following his baptism by John, and after his forty days of temptation in the desert, he has begun his ministry in Galilee. He has called his disciples Peter, Andrew, James and John. He has climbed the mountain to deliver his first sermon—his first discourse—the Sermon on the Mount, which includes the Beatitudes. In it he has described what the Kingdom of God is like, this radical way of life in God. Jesus has now come down from the mountain and along with his disciples walking through the countryside, has healed many people. And so we get to chapter nine, our gospel for today, and in it we find three stories in which Jesus illustrates something that will become fundamental for our faith, that being resurrection, which is the topic of our sermon today.

We all know about the resurrection of Jesus. It is at the heart of Christianity. The Outline of the Faith—what we call the Catechism—in our Book of Common Prayer says this: “What is the significance of Jesus' resurrection? By his resurrection, Jesus overcame death and opened for us the way of eternal life.” I believe personally that it is a complicated theology, but that's OK. We don't need to understand everything. Indeed St. Paul says it is beyond our understanding. We must remember that mystery is an important part of our faith. As Christians we celebrate Jesus' resurrection at all times, especially at Easter and throughout the Great Fifty Days of the Easter season, but also every Sunday, which we call the Lord's Day and the day of resurrection. I believe that in addition to whatever happened on that Sunday following Jesus' crucifixion and death—in other words in addition to the resurrection of Jesus—we can look

at resurrection as a fundamental reality of life. First of all, even within scripture—both the Old and New Testaments—according to the Strong Concordance there are resurrections in nine places. In 1st Kings there is Elijah restoring life to the widow’s son who had died. In 2nd Kings there is Elisha restoring life to the Shunammite’s son who he found “lying dead on his bed.” Again in 2nd Kings there is the unnamed man dead who comes back to life and “stood on his feet” after being thrown into the grave of Elisha. We see resurrection today in Jesus’ bringing Jairus’ daughter back to life. In Luke’s gospel Jesus brings the only son of a widow of Nain back to life, when he says “Young man, I say to you, rise!” and the man sits up and begins to speak. We see it in John when Jesus restores life to his friend Lazarus who has been dead for four days. Later in Matthew, after Jesus on the cross has breathed his last, “the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.” Peter in the book of Acts raises the woman Dorcas from death, saying to her “Tabitha, get up.” And of course there is the resurrection of Jesus himself, when following the humiliating torture and his death on the cross, Jesus rises again—stands again—a sign of eternal life, eternal hope. It is also important to remember that in John’s gospel Jesus says that resurrection is taking place now: “Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”

Let’s look at the word “resurrection” from a broader perspective than just raising one who has died back to life. The word resurrection is derived from the Latin word “resurgere” (Rey-SOOR-jeh-reh) which means “to rise again.” The Hebrew word—which I cannot pronounce—means “being restored to life by the power of God.” Our rector Jim interprets it to mean simply “to stand with dignity.” We can interpret our three stories in the gospel today as being resurrection stories. First Jesus sees a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth. Matthew is a tax collector, a collaborator with the Romans, despised by the Jews. Remember that it was Matthew and others like him whose corrupt

work in collecting taxes for the Roman authorities helped sustain the oppressive system of power within the empire that caused so much suffering among the people of Israel. People like Matthew were despised and shunned by most of the Jews. Jesus calls this social outcast Matthew to join him anyway. What he says is “Follow me,” and Matthew “got up and followed him.” Again, the words “got up,” stands up. I can imagine that he stood up with a newfound dignity because of this encounter with Jesus. He leaves his tax collector life, becomes a part of another empire with different standards, an empire where compassion and mercy has precedence. Following Jesus meant encountering God’s empire, the world of Spirit where Jesus lives, and into which he invites Matthew and of course now us. Matthew loyally follows Jesus throughout his ministry, all the way to the crucifixion and beyond. I would say he experienced resurrection. The next scene in the gospel reveals more. In it are two examples of sick people, one a woman and the other a young girl, to whom Jesus is called. The little girl has already died. The other is bleeding to death. Both are “unclean” by religious rules, according to which Jesus would himself be considered “unclean” if he were to touch them. Of course this does not stop Jesus. The woman who approaches him has been hemorrhaging for twelve years, living in fear and loneliness, on the fringes of society, “unclean” and cast aside by her neighbors. She approaches him trembling, and says “If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.” She reaches out to touch his cloak, and when she touches him Jesus feels his healing power moving from him into her. “Instantly,” says the gospel, she is made well. Jesus says to her “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well. “Daughter” he calls her. Imagine how she must have felt, her relief, being healed, being accepted in love, a new beginning in life. She can once again stand with dignity. Resurrected. Jesus then continues on to the home of the little girl who has died. Her father the religious leader—a member of the privileged and socially accepted, this scene an example of the all inclusiveness of Jesus’ love—the father had on his knees approached Jesus, saying, “My

daughter has just died; but come and lay your hands on her, and she will live.” When Jesus arrives at the home, there is sadness, grief and mourning. He goes inside, takes her by the hand, and the girl gets up. Once again, resurrection.

All three stories are examples of resurrection in its many forms, not only after we die, but actions in our lives now, today. In his book The Universal Christ, in the chapter “The Resurrection Journey,” Richard Rohr starts with this, “I want to enlarge your view of resurrection—from a one-time miracle in the life of Jesus that asks for assent and belief, to a pattern of creation that has always been true, and that invites us to much more than belief in a miracle. It must be more than the private victory of one man to prove that he is God.” St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians also expands our understanding of resurrection saying: “If there is no resurrection from death, Christ himself cannot have been raised.” In other words resurrection is a universal principle of all reality, a reality within creation prior to the life of the man Jesus, a foundational aspect of this God-created life,. It does not apply only to Jesus, but rather to all that God has created. What happened to Jesus is the blueprint for all of life—the way life works: life to death to life again—eternal, never ending. We see it throughout creation: in the birth and death of stars as they explode, releasing their elements into the rest of the universe—energy and light and elements that bring forth new life, just as our Earth when it was formed almost five billion years ago, our planet Earth out of which we were born and are now a living part. We see it in the change of seasons, all of creation contributing to new life as we move from winter to spring, and then back again, over and over. Resurrection is another word for change, always a positive change, from one form of life to another. As the Catholic funeral liturgy says, “Life is not ended, it is merely changed.” St. Paul puts it well again when he tells the Corinthians “We are not all going to die, but we shall all be changed.” Notice he uses the word “all” twice. It applies to all of us. It applies to all of creation. It is I think a natural progression of thinking to say that resurrection is also our source of hope. It is the hope of this eternal

Christ that is within us and within all created things. The Eternal Christ, who never dies, and who never dies in you. Resurrection is about the whole of creation; it is about history; it is about every human who has ever been conceived, suffered, and died; every animal that has lived and died; every element that has changed from solid, to liquid, to gas, over great expanses of time. It is about every thing.* We will all be resurrected, and the beauty of it is that the creator God has given all of us the power to resurrect others. Look at your own life. From what loss or illness or other suffering have you, with the help of friends or other loved ones, over time found healing and hope, a new beginning—resurrection into new life?

Our friend Frederick Buechner puts it this way when talking about what happened to Jesus on that Sunday morning: “I have no idea what happened except, as I say, what really matters is not so much what happened there as what happens now—what happens in your life and my life, what happens in the world...the essential message is that nothing, no horror can happen that can permanently, irrevocably quench the presence of holiness that is always there... Yes, this hideous death of a good man abandoned, as it would seem, by God. Yet the best has come out of it, which is this nourishing current of hope and new life that still flows in spite of everything...Julian of Norwich puts it so well: ‘All shall be well, and all manner of things will be well.’ That, I think, is the message of Easter,” Buechner said. I would add: That is the message of resurrection.

*The Universal Christ, Richard Rohr

Rev. Bob Donnell