

## **The Essential Ingredient**

*1 Corinthians 15:1-10; Acts 1:1-14*

The Call to Worship in your bulletins and the passage I've just read to you both focus in on the resurrection of Jesus and they both mention almost incidentally the impact that the death and resurrection had on Jesus' mother and his half-brothers whom we've already seen were skeptical about Jesus' public ministry during the years he had presented himself over hill and dale and on the highways and byways as Israel's long promised Savior and long awaited king.

For two weeks we have watched Jesus' mother and brothers struggle with his sudden, inexplicable abandonment of the traditional responsibilities an eldest son was expected to bear for his family after the death of their father. Jesus had always been an odd one, missing the caravan home as a twelve year old boy at his first Passover, but he had also been a good one, respecting his mother and step-father as a boy, staying on in the woodshop as a young man after Joseph's death, quietly working away for likely more than fifteen years.

And then one day on a visit to John the Baptist at the Jordan River, all that heavenly oddness broke out again, the Spirit visibly descending on Jesus as he arose from the water, and a voice from God in heaven announcing that Jesus had always been God's Son, at which point Jesus heads out into the desert to do God knows what for forty days, after which he returns, not to home, not to his job, but to Capernaum where he convinces an assortment of tradesmen and misfits, men and women both, to leave their jobs and families and to wander the countryside as a sort of new Israel with Jesus as a sort of new Moses, headed to God knows where to do God knows what.

And Jesus' family, Mary and James and Jude and Joses and Simon slipped into one of those negative reactions that overtake us all when we're confronted by a way of life we don't understand and can't really believe in. Early on, the family headed out together to try to get Jesus to come to his senses and resume a life that made sense. The last we hear from his brothers in John's gospel, they were taunting Jesus to at least try to be the sort of Savior, the sort of king, that people could understand, something more than just a dreamy vagrant wandering the countryside.

But this morning we've read two passages from just after the Resurrection which find Mary and her sons in the company of the disciples of Jesus, worshiping and praying with them in a low rent, second story banquet hall, waiting for the things, the mysterious, intangible things that Jesus had promised them were about to happen. And I'd like to suggest to you that the family had

suffered three shocks which had changed their hearts to the point where they could finally see Jesus, their loved one as something more, something different than the son and brother they'd lost.

I believe the first shock that brought them around was the brutal, public, unjust death that Jesus suffered at the hands of Israel's rulers and their Roman allies. It was one thing for them to be angry at their brother for leaving the family business and the family table to become a religious eccentric. It was something entirely different to see him take the national stage and give his life for the people he stood for and the gospel he taught. I think it's only natural that, at the death of Jesus, he once again became the brother they loved, only natural that the grief of his passing would break their hearts open enough to see him in a new and kinder light.

And the second shock would have been the change in their mother, Mary, at the death of her beloved firstborn. In John 19, Mary appears at the Cross in the company of our old friend John, who fancied himself, "*the disciple Jesus loved*" and who alone among the Twelve was bold enough to approach the Cross in the company of Jesus' aunt and mother and Mary Magdalene. I would guess that Jesus' brothers were in the city for the Passover, but like the Twelve they didn't think they'd get past the Roman platoon line to be with their brother. But in that moment at the cross, Jesus did an astounding thing, he looked down on Mary and John and said, "*Woman, behold your son.*" And to John, "*Behold, your mother.*"

"*And from that hour,*" John tells us, "*the disciple took her into his own home.*" In other words, that evening when the burial was over, Mary went with John back to the upper room where the disciples were staying and not to wherever her sons were for the holiday. Which had to have broken the brothers' hearts open even wider than the death of Jesus must have done. And to my mind, if they were in the city and I think they were, there was only one place for them to be that night and that was with their mother, first just to love her and second to hear what had happened at the Cross to land Mary in the company of John that night.

Nobody in the upper room that night really understood what the Cross meant or where it would lead them. But Mary had decided to honor Jesus' last wish and become family with the disciples who had followed Jesus to the point of the Cross. Do we remember what Jesus had said to his family in Galilee years earlier in Mark's gospel? "*Who is my brother, sister and mother? He who does the will of God, he is my brother, sister and mother.*" It was not just an empty slogan.

Nor did it mean that Jesus loved his birth family any less than he had in the years he sat at their dinner table. The point is that to love and follow Jesus is to take to heart the men and women around us who also love and follow Jesus as family, to love them as brothers and sisters, their

parents and their children dear and precious to us as well. And the point of the exercise is not to diminish the love we owe our loved ones by birth and marriage.

Jesus is not teaching us to be heartless to our flesh and blood families. The point, which might be counterintuitive to an unbeliever, is that the faithfulness we show one another at church, the love and encouragement and accountability we exercise here is meant to strengthen the relationships we build in our own families where blood and marriage have landed us. And this is exactly how it worked for Mary and James and Jude and Joses and Simon. Once Mary saw her firstborn as her Savior and his disciples as her family, her sons wound up in a place where their hearts could begin to learn that Jesus hadn't left home to hurt them but to save them.

It was a change of heart that wasn't easy for the brothers to make and we shouldn't expect that it will be easy for our loved ones either. James and Jude and Joses and Simon had already been shocked by the violence and cruelty and injustice of Jesus' death. And they were shocked again to see their mother enter the company of the very disciples whom Jesus had loved enough to leave his own dinner table. And the third shock that that likely opened their hearts to come around and believe was the resurrection at dawn on the third day after Jesus died.

I think they had stayed in the city after the burial because Mary and her sister and the women disciples who made up that new family Jesus had gathered around himself, the women all decided that Jesus' rushed burial at sundown on the Sabbath was good enough. It was customary for women in old Israel to gather and welcome new children into their village societies. The baby and the mother were washed and wrapped and welcomed and celebrated by whatever women were there to observe the arrival of a new child in Israel. And it was customary for the women to gather at the death of a loved one and neighbor to wash and perfume and wrap the body in a way that expressed love to the one lost and to his survivors.

And so it was the women who gathered where Jesus lay at dawn on Sunday, the earliest possible kosher moment, only to discover yet another shock that Jesus no longer lay in the elaborate tomb that Joseph of Arimathea provided for him. The wrappings were there, cloths still swirled around with no body inside them. And at that moment began the pageantry we celebrate every spring on the Sunday after Passover. Mary Magdalene mistaking Jesus for the gardener, which Jesus was, but no ordinary gardener in no ordinary cemetery. And from there Jesus began showing up everywhere including the upper room where his disciples were with his likely with his family.

And I think the resurrection was likely the last wonderful, hopeful shock that opened the hearts of James and Jude and Joses and Simon to see their older brother as the Servant Savior he had always been, submitted to their mother and father at home and in the woodshop for most of his

life, but then submitting to his real Father in heaven on a much more difficult and all-encompassing task than staying at home with the family he never ceased to love. I think they were all there for many of the early resurrection appearances of Jesus.

But let's say I'm wrong and the brothers weren't in Jerusalem for the Passover and that Mary suffered the grief of Jesus' death and felt the elation of his resurrection without her other boys there. In our Call to Worship from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, Paul reminds the believers, decades later in faraway Corinth, that Jesus had specifically appeared to his brother James during the forty day when he was busy orienting all the Christian brothers and sisters to the meaning and significance of his resurrection. So James was welcomed into that other family Jesus loved, you and I and every other soul the Holy Spirit has moved to trust Jesus as a Savior and bow to him as a king.

The long and the short of it is that, after years of struggle and doubt and anger and confusion, some combination of shock and grief and adversity along with wonder and transport and grace brought the brothers of Jesus around, reconciled the two families that Jesus loved into one mixed family based on Jesus' gospel and subject to his commands. Which is not to say that everything is sorted out. We read in Acts this morning that, even after the resurrection, the disciples were still confused about what Jesus' kingdom would be and how it would sort out over time and in their lives. It wasn't until the Holy Spirit visibly descended on them some days later that things began to shake clear.

We'll see next week that Jesus' brother James will in the years to come find himself in an elaborate dance with Peter and then Paul, all of them having to labor and work through what it meant that in their generation old Israel would slowly move off stage to make room for a new Israel, people like you and me in the Church embarked on a new Exodus through a different kind of wilderness in the last days. And what we'll find is that the heartache and confusion and estrangement that challenged Jesus mother and brothers will also challenge us in our relationships with parents and children and spouses and brothers and sisters and friends.

It won't be any easier for us to see Jesus as he really is and to trust him as a Savior and obey him as a king. The good news being that the Holy Spirit who descended on the disciples and apostles and family of Jesus is still in play. Which matters to me because I was a guy who was never going to end up in church, was never going to follow Christ and learn a gospel and wrestle with commands and reach for holiness, I was never going to do that unless the Holy Spirit came after me, I believe in answer to my mother and my uncle's prayers.

So I tell the story over and over again. Last week Natalie read my sermon and said, "What! We're at the ice cream counter again? We have to hear that story again?" I'll try to give it a rest. But it's where God caught me. And the point of the matter for me is that, if the Spirit could find

and reach and turn me from where I was headed, he can do it for anyone we love. Now who God chooses and calls and saves is a mystery. Some of the best people never get there, and some of the worst are chosen and called and saved despite themselves.

Nothing we do will ever make us the master of that, but God invites us to play a role, to have a say, to open an upper room like this one, and gather like Jesus' disciples to pray of one accord that people we love, broken, hurting, angry people will get caught in the wind of the Spirit and hear the gospel we share and read the Bible we keep and become brothers and sister in God's own family.