



SERMONS THAT WORK

Easter 4 (C)

Pointing to God

[RCL]: Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30

Have any of you heard of the game *Marco Polo*? Not the app – that is something different. This game can be played in a swimming pool or on land. The person who is “It” is blindfolded and placed in the center of a group of people. They call out, “Marco!” while the others call out, “Polo!” The “It” person tries to reach one of the group members and touch them. When they do, the person touched becomes the person who is “It” and the other rejoins the group.

Now, if you haven’t played Marco Polo, you may have done a trust walk before, which is kind of similar. You are blindfolded and led through an unfamiliar place by a person who can see. You are completely at the mercy of that person. You have to trust them and have faith that they will keep you from falling or getting hurt. Now, if a random person asked to blindfold you and play Marco Polo or do a trust walk, would you do it? What about if someone from our faith community asked you? You would probably be more likely to say yes to them than to a stranger.

This can be a fun game, but it is more about the trust you have in the person or people with whom you are playing than in playing the game itself. It speaks to the relationship between the vulnerable person who cannot see the way ahead and the person who is responding to their call. There is always a call and a response, just like in our relationship with God. Like being a lost lamb in the night, we call out to God. When we hear a voice respond, we call out again, and again the voice responds. We go back and forth like the Marco Polo game so that we draw closer and closer to one another. We trust the voice to lead us through the valley of the shadows and guide us along right pathways. In goodness and mercy, God pursues us, and, in that relationship, we are cared for like the sheep of a shepherd. God draws near to us – but are we drawing near to God?

In Lent, we wandered in the wilderness, following Jesus all the way to Golgotha. In Eastertide, we find ourselves seeking the resurrected Jesus in a completely different landscape. In our own lives, practicing resurrection daily means that we pay attention to different things than does the rest of the world. In our Gospel story today, Jesus does works in God’s name and makes it clear that he and God are united in the work that they do. The Gospel of John reinforces that this is about purpose, not about the metaphysical relationship. The Greek word in verse 30 for “one” is neuter, not masculine, suggesting that, in this particular context, Jesus is not stressing that he and God are one person, but instead that they each have the same call—being united in their work. What would it mean if we take this example to heart? How would our lives be changed if we were seeking to unite ourselves with Jesus’ work, which is ultimately God’s work? Do we know our shepherd’s voice and follow him daily into this landscape of resurrection?

This image of the good shepherd is poetically captured in Psalm 23, so often read at funerals, but it is certainly not to be confined to that threshold. The imagery is rich, meaningful, and comforting while we gambol like lambs in the landscape of practicing resurrection. As we play Marco Polo with God, the psalmist reminds us of how we need to move through transition in our lives—any transition—whether it be death, divorce, job loss, moving, loss of health, or anything with change. Knowing that when we cry out, “Marco!” God inevitably responds, “Polo!” guides us through those times where the only way out is to live through them – one trusting step at a time. Draw near to God and God will draw near to you. Even when we are having a dark night of the soul, God is still closer than our breath. We must continue to be faithful even when we feel forsaken because God is still with us.

Human beings want to see signs—something measurable—but John’s Gospel tells us that even the signs that Jesus does aren’t enough. Eventually, we need to act as though believing is a choice—it is a free will action, rather than the goal of an argument. The time comes when evaluating the evidence must end. There is the immeasurable act of faith that must happen. Thomas Keating writes, “The chief thing that separates us from God is the thought that we are separated from [God]. If we get rid of that thought, our troubles will be greatly reduced.”

This is how we are called to continue God’s work in the world: One small step in the darkness toward the voice – a soft shuffle in the right direction that brings us closer. As we respond to God’s voice, others who are also lost hear us and are able to call out to God themselves. The things we do when we follow Jesus in our daily lives matter, and the ripple effects are clear.

In today’s reading from the Book of Acts, Peter is called to the deathbed of a devout disciple of Jesus, Tabitha, who did many acts of charity. This is the only time that the feminine form of “disciple” is used in the New Testament, which clues us in to how vital she was to her faith community. She is also called Dorcas in our passage, the dual name indicating she is a Greek-speaking Jew. When he gets there, he kneels down and prays, then asks her to get up. Miraculously, she does, like the little girl in the story from Mark 5. There is great rejoicing as she is restored to her community—another aspect of God’s healing. However, no one bows down to worship either Peter or Tabitha. It is because of Peter’s relationship with Jesus and his confidence in that relationship that he is able to heal and share the Good News. Peter’s focus was on God and because of his faithful act in Jesus’ name, “many believed in the Lord.” How would we be different if we behaved this way?

Jesus is clear and Peter’s example is clear: everything must always point to God. Jesus’ signs, Peter’s healing, the neighbor we help, the communities to which we contribute, and the lives across the world that we touch in this digital age—all tell of the glory of God, so that people may come to know and *believe*. This is the Good News. This is practicing resurrection daily. Alleluia! AMEN.

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