

Sermon for 4-24-11 Easter  
1 Peter 1:1-12

In the old TV show Northern Exposure, Dr. Joel Fleischman has his medical school paid for by the state of Alaska. In return this man born and raised in New York City must spend four years living in small town Alaska, a place where he doesn't fit at all. The show is a story of a man in exile. 1 Peter is written to exiles. An exile is a temporary resident in a foreign place. A person living in a place that is not their own.

There are two ways for us to look at how we are exiles. The first is that we don't fit in the church. We're just here for Easter. We aren't sure we believe. We may have questions about Jesus and are looking for answers. We aren't comfortable because people already know each other and seem so sure about faith. We are disconnected from Jesus as the primary location that shapes our identity.

The second is that we are exiles as described in 1 Peter 1:2. We are different than society at large. God forms our identity, past, present, and future. We have been chosen and destined by God. God has grabbed hold of our life and set it on the course he desires. We are sanctified by the Spirit. The Spirit decontaminates us and sets us to particular tasks of service. We become obedient to Christ, sprinkled in his blood. Christ will help us walk in his ways. Though we are as yet imperfect, there is continual reconnection to Jesus as the primary location for our identity.

As exiles not fully comfortable where we are, Peter greets us. "May grace and peace be yours in abundance." These are meaningless words unless we consider the resurrection of Jesus that we are celebrating today. It is resurrection that accomplishes this greeting's expectation for everyone who is out of place. Resurrection gives us the expectation (of grace) that the love of God gives new life wherever we are whether we deserve it or not. Resurrection gives us the expectation (of peace) that our life can be made whole and lived fully. Resurrection gives us these expectations in abundance.

Resurrection transforms our exile (from Jesus, from the world) by creating a community of the newly born. Here is how this is possible. Resurrection brings new birth into a living hope. We have hope in a Savior, Jesus, who died so that our sins might not keep us apart from God. But Jesus is not dead. He is risen. He lives. Faith in the resurrection means we don't have to live based on our sins. We can live a life of love. We don't think about life the same way trying to get all we can before we die. We can live life for others.

Faith in the resurrection creates such a disruption in the ordinary that it is best referred to as new birth. (A new birth is messy and miraculous. To see my daughter take a first breath, you can't think about life in the same way. You can't just live for yourself. A new birth sets in motion the reshaping and the forming of a family.)

New birth is not the goal but the entryway to community. New birth is not just about now, but about the future. Resurrection brings us new birth into an inheritance. An inheritance we gain now, but not something just for now, something that lasts and does not perish, is not defiled (even by our sins), and does not fade. This kind of inheritance is made possible by the

resurrection. God conquering death by bringing life, by raising Jesus from the dead. Life is no longer defined by death. As a part of the community of the newly born we will share in the resurrection of Jesus.

New birth makes us part of a family that we weren't before. If you feel an exile from the family of faith, believe in the resurrection. Let your life no longer be based on death and limitation, but on the limitless love of God that raises the dead and gives a living hope. Let your life no longer be based on you, but on the God who brings life in all its fullness and gives an unending inheritance. Then we will no longer be exiles but share the life of Jesus with others.

What if your new birth seems years ago and has lost its newness, has faced suffering? The attacks and struggles we face being an exile from society can wear us down. We look at who we are and see little or no difference from those around us who don't take God seriously. Resurrection sustains us as exiles whose identity is shaped by Jesus. Faith in the resurrection leads us to know that even though we face the reality of sin and death we are protected by the power of God for 'full' salvation that will be revealed. Faith in the resurrection is not just for the future it makes us belong with others in the present. God continues to be active in our lives renewing our new birth within the community of faith.

So we will rejoice even in the midst of trials, because our faith is being revealed as genuine. Despite our doubts, our tiredness, our exile, our lives lived as part of the community formed by faith in the resurrection will be seen as faithful lives when Jesus is revealed.

Whatever type of exile we are, how can we embrace the difficult reality of resurrection? The proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus contradicts the ordinary and observable laws of nature. The women who go to Jesus' tomb stand perplexed and terrified as they are told that Jesus has risen. When they are reminded that Jesus had told them this would happen they go tell the disciples. The disciples think their story of resurrection is an idle tale. The disciples do not believe in Jesus' resurrection at first. What do we believe?

Helen Keller was unable to see, or hear, or speak. She writes in her diary of the day her life of exile was transformed, "We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten -- a thrill of returning to thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that w-a-t-e-r meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away."<sup>1</sup>

Resurrection is a mystery that when revealed to us transforms our lives. Communion is like holding our hand under the water, as Jesus writes on our hearts. We awaken or reawaken to love Jesus, believe in him, and rejoice with indescribable and glorious joy at his resurrection, though we do not see him.

We join together to celebrate resurrection in Communion. Celebration lifts our hearts out of the discouragement and suffering of our exile. Communion reminds us that we belong together in the present and future. Communion is a celebration of the new life of the community of faith established by the resurrection. Communion makes real the connections we have with Jesus and others so we know that we need not be exiles from one another, but exiles together for the sake of Jesus.

As we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus affirming its truth, it empowers our life in the present and changes the quality of our life. Though we are exiles, we experience the blessing of grace and peace in abundance in the new life of the community of faith. Awakened, might I say resurrected we receive the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our souls.

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<sup>i</sup> Malcolm Warford , Becoming a New Church, 32 quoting Hellen Keller