

Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

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Date: September 13, 2020
Sermon: "Our Easter: Continuous Resurrection"
Scripture: Excerpts from Acts 1 and 2
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe

After his suffering, Jesus presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. . . . When the day of Pentecost had come, the Disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.

This is Deacons' Picnic Sunday! Right? You remember, the Sunday after Labor Day, the Church is packed. The Deacons are outside cooking up a barbecue. We celebrate the beginning of the new Church year. At the end, 120 Sunday School kids and their teachers parade into Church, everybody singing, "Jesus Loves Me."

Then we go across the green, eat a great lunch fresh off the grill; we have games and a big bouncy house for the kids and an old-fashioned ice cream truck. And before you know it, we're off and running to a great new Church year! This year? No ice cream. No barbecue. No kids. No party. Instead, we have Easter. Yes, you heard me right! Easter. One of the many things we lost with the Covid shutdown was Easter 2020. I mean not that we lost Easter, but

we lost Easter Sunday: glorious music, a packed Church, the altar area of the Church full of lilies.

I do know that Marcia and our Junior Deacons did reconfigure our children's annual Easter Egg Hunt just a couple of weeks ago, but the euphoria of Easter Sunday we missed. But not Easter. So on this Deacons' Picnic Sunday everyone's back. Let's have a party! Minus the picnic, minus the party, and everyone's back, minus all that. It's still a good time to show our "moxie."

Are there enough people in our Church with roots in Maine to know what Moxie is? Moxie is the bitterest-tasting soft drink in America that only Maine people truly love. You have to be half-moose and half-lumberjack to love Moxie. Moxie is also a "get-up-and-go, tough-it-out, strong-willed-determination, get-the-job-done" kind of attitude.

That's what Alida and I are bringing to Church life as we enter autumn, as we unfold this new Church year. As we face all the challenges around us, we are bringing the "moxie." And we base our confidence, our "moxie," on two hallmarks of our Christian faith: the Resurrection and Pentecost.

The Resurrection and the days after, that's my part: Jesus, back to life, convincing others that he's back to life. Pentecost and the time after, that's Alida's part: the official birth of the Christian Church, empowered and let loose.

There's nothing more important than Jesus's Easter Resurrection. Nobody is a Christian because of Christmas. Christmas is a wonderful story, I believe it, fully. But Christmas is the story of a miraculous birth, and every parent will tell you, every birth is a miracle, every child is a miracle.

Lots of Christians emphasize the Cross, Jesus's death on Good Friday by crucifixion. And to be blunt, I emphasize that in my personal faith. The willing sacrifice of God's son just to show us how much we are loved. That's powerful. But in and of itself, Good Friday alone is only another story of the unjust death of an innocent man.

In our world, history's world is full of stories of unjust deaths of innocent people. The difference-maker is three days later, Easter morning, when the tomb is empty, the body of Jesus is gone, and then, hour by hour, day by day, Jesus is up and about. He's fully engaged with people, he's alive, real, relevant. His appearances are personal, tangible, convincing. Indeed, when St. Luke sought to summarize Jesus's post-Easter appearances, he calls them "convincing proofs." *Convincing proofs*. "Convincing" means removing doubt, taking away any idea that it was a dream, a hallucination, mob-psychology at work, wish fulfillment on the part of Jesus's followers.

Remember, no one—none of Jesus’s friends or loved ones—got up on Easter morning believing. The women at the tomb thought grave robbers had taken Jesus’s body. And when they were finally convinced of Jesus’s Resurrection, the male Disciples mocked the women. St. Thomas famously doubted. The men on the road to Emmaus discounted the Resurrection story as gossip.

But one by one, Jesus met with the doubters, the skeptics, and he met them where they were, at their point of need. Over the course of about 40 days, Jesus met with the disbelievers, the guilt ridden, the depressed, the heartbroken, and the hungry. And he dealt with it, each one’s need, each one’s condition. Peter needed a hug. The men on the road to Emmaus needed fellowship. Thomas needed to see the wounds in Jesus’s hands and feet. The Disciples needed to be fed. Mary Magdalene needed to hear Jesus’s voice.

I’m suggesting that this is our post-Easter time for our Church. That the first job of our Church is to show people we are alive, to let people hear our voice, to provide the feeling of community, of fellowship, of togetherness. In cop shows, it’s called “proof of life.” In the Bible, it’s “convincing proofs.” Either way, life must be evidenced for people to believe. Let people know we are here, we are running on every cylinder, we are positive, we’re forceful, we’re faithful, we are ready, willing, and able.

Last week, I told you about the Habitat for Humanity project on the Lower East side of Manhattan back in the mid 80s. Famous people like Jimmy Carter and his friends, nobodies like me and my Church teenagers, we showed up to gut and rehab an old six-story apartment house for families in need of housing. And that was all well and good. People in the neighborhood were nice to us, very welcoming. We were like Easter, the first sign of new life in that neighborhood. But you know what really, really made folks take notice? Within a few months, a supermarket opened, then a bank. Proof of life. Convincing proofs. The supermarket and the bank were the business world’s way of saying to that long-abandoned neighborhood, “We thought you were dead! But now we see life!”

You’ve seen the banners on our Church lawn all summer. We commissioned one of our teenage artists, Haley Roberts, to create a graphic design based on the Christian concept of “Continuous Resurrection.” *Continuous Resurrection*. It’s a phrase used by my Czech priest friend, Tomáš Halík, who said that today’s Christianity must stop looking backward, to the glory days, to the “good old days,” even to the first days of Christianity. Instead, we need to pick up where Jesus left off. He did his Resurrection, he showed and proved and did life. Now, dare we be proof, daily proof, personal, intimate, real, convincing proof of Resurrection life? Our task, our calling, is that we be daily proof of life every time anybody comes by this little Church. We are an Easter people. We are a

Resurrection people. People should see it in our faces. Hear it in our words. Know it in our works.

Our closing hymn today is "God of Grace and God of Glory."

*God of grace and God of glory,
on thy people pour thy power;
crown thine ancient Church's story;
bring its bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the facing of this hour,
for the facing of this hour.*

*Lo! the hosts of evil round us
scorn thy Christ, assail thy ways!
From the fears that long have bound us
free our hearts to faith and praise.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the living of these days,
for the living of these days.*

*Cure thy children's warring madness,
bend our pride to thy control;
shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
lest we miss thy righteous goal,
lest we miss thy righteous goal.*

*Set our feet on lofty places;
fill our lives that we may be
strengthened with all Christ-like graces
pledges to set all captives free.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
lest we fail our call from thee,
lest we fail our call from thee.*

*Save us from weak resignation
to the evils we deplore;
let the search for thy salvation
be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
serving thee whom we adore,
serving thee whom we adore.*