

I John 20:19-31 This Word of Life
1 John 1:1-3
April 11, 2021

Well, it is the Easter season and right on queue spring came. The trees came out and the early flowers have bloomed. It is a celebration of life that not even a pandemic can diminish. It is the season of the Risen Son and it is most appropriately named after the rising of the sun in the east each new day.

The Resurrection is about life, and is a companion to the doctrine of creation, which is also about life, both are a little enigmatic. Scientists can trace life's origins almost all the way to its first moment, but cannot determine the spark. Conversely, as we look forward to heaven, we are able only to dream, unable to do heaven's majesty justice. Life in creation and life in Resurrection are thus connected, and we ask after their meaning.

The story of Thomas, the disciple who wasn't present when Jesus first appeared to them in the locked room, presents this same dilemma. A week later when he was present Jesus scolded him for believing only what he could see. What makes *life* a religious question is the trouble we have looking back and finding its beginning and forward to its perfection. We must believe in what can't be seen.

The First Epistle of John addresses its readers with a simple message meant to encourage them even though they were not graced to have been able to see

in person the Risen Jesus. The first few verses also make the connection between creation and resurrection. Let me share them with you now.

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”

Since words pale before the magnitude of both Creation and Resurrection (art and music are better), we, at least, I, sometimes look for grand things that are a part of creation as analogies of these greater truths. After church on Easter, and the word itself is such an analogy, it is a part of creation what happens in the east each day, but it is the best word we have for what we celebrate, I got in my car to get away for a couple of days, which I hadn't done in awhile because of the pandemic.

I ended up in western New York. I had never seen Niagara Falls and thought I would like to see them. I think I was looking for something that would make me say, “wow.” And they of course did. That whole geographic formation is staggering. Lake Erie sits over 300 feet higher than Lake Ontario to its north. In a 36 mile drop it drains down into the easternmost of the

Great Lakes. Over half of that drop happens in one spot.

While I was there I was looking at some of the churches in town, and noticed one particular church that looked like to me it might be Catholic but when I drove past, it turned out to be The First Baptist Church. It has been my occasional practice to visit such churches when I get the chance. I wanted to see the inside of the building. Graciously they invited me for a tour.

I should mention that I was raised and have served in churches that were mostly built in the 1950's and 1960's. But this church had a history similar to ours. It was formed in the first half of the 19th century, built its first building in the 1850's, and its present building in 1900. The sanctuary is a little bigger than ours but in many ways similar.

It has about the same shape, but what really caught my attention was some of the stained glass which has similar coloring, and some of the same symbols. For instance, one of the windows has an anchor, another a dove, still another a cross and a crown. There was a window with an open bible. The man who gave me this tour explained the significance of each window.

Buildings speak, they preach a sermon and it is a message from the people who built it. They tell us about what inspired them and enlivened them, what they thought was important. They are saying what they have seen and heard concerning the Word of Life.

And it wasn't just one congregation bearing witness, but a generation of congregations.

Go around and look at our windows and see what they are preaching to us, week after week; Christ the Anchor of Life, a steadying force in uncertain times. Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet. The dove descending with a twig in its mouth, signifying the receding of the floodwaters. Loyalty to Christ means service. Behold, I stand at the door and knock . . .”

That is what they had seen and heard, and so have we. We bear witness to life, in our own lives, the lives of our neighbors and friends and family, the life of the world. They used words like love and forgiveness and reconciliation, going so far in John's first letter to say that, “God *is* love.” From time to time even we used these words.

Thus we have fellowship with the ones who wrote this letter and built this building and countless others, dare I say, with Jesus himself. It is Easter, a celebration of life and goodness that no trouble can diminish. We sit in its shadow and wonder at its majesty, its grandeur, and in the testimony of those who preceded us. We say, “Easter.” There is so much more. May we never fail to hear its Word of Life.

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