

As we approach Thanksgiving at the end of the month, we are called to take some time to stop and give thanks to God for the many blessing in our lives. During this month of November, I invite you to take on the practice of giving thanks to God for something different in your life every day. This can be done by writing something down each day or by saying these praises to God through prayer. This is a wonderful practice which reminds us that God has given us so many things in our lives, many of which we may take for granted.

I'll start... Today I am thankful for all of you and that we get to be in ministry together in this community. Today I also give thanks to God for who God is, the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In our humanity, is it difficult for us to fully understand this multifaceted God, and yet we desire to know and understand God more.

This week we are starting a three-week sermon series entitled “Thankful for the Trinity.” Each week we will celebrate a different person in the Trinity. In this way, we can give thanks to God for all the ways in which we experience God throughout the Bible and in our lives.

Today we are celebrating Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We especially give thanks to God for Christ’s resurrection.

As Christians we claim to be resurrection people, but it is interesting that in the Christian Year we only devote one Sunday solely to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Easter Sunday. Yet this is the defining characteristic of the Son of God, that he died for our sins, and defeated even death to set us free and give us new life and the hope and promise in the resurrection.

On Easter Sunday we tell once again the story of the resurrection, where Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden and told her to share the news of his resurrection with his disciples (John 20:11-18).

We too are called to share this good resurrection news about Jesus Christ. In fact, there is where our very hope comes from, that we too are children of the resurrection.

In our Scripture today from the Gospel of Luke we see that the Sadducees were questioning Jesus and trying to disprove the importance of the resurrection. In fact, they did not believe that resurrection even happened.

History tells us that the Sadducees were “a religious faction that wielded societal power in nearly every aspect except military—and for that they had the backing of their Roman benefactors. These were the Jewish aristocrats of their day, known as much for their wealth and corruption as for their religious devotion.”ⁱ

The Sadducees focused their beliefs on the first five books of the Bible. Unlike the Pharisees, they did not believe that the oral tradition of religion was important, and they did not believe that resurrection was possible.ⁱⁱ

In the conversation they are having with Jesus in Luke 20, commentary tells us that the Sadducees are trying to “make resurrection look ridiculous.”ⁱⁱⁱ Drawing from their Jewish understanding of Levirate marriage, the Sadducees asked Jesus who would be the true husband of the seven brothers that married the same woman upon each other’s death, as was their custom to keep their inheritance in the family.

Jesus explained to the Sadducees that they were focusing on the wrong thing. They surely did not understand the point of the resurrection. Jesus explained in our resurrection lives we do not simply continue the relationships we were in before. In this case they thought this woman would be expected to continue relationships with all seven of the deceased brothers.

The point of resurrection, Jesus explained, was that people are no longer each other’s property (as was the case of the woman in question), but are children of God, or in Jesus’ words: “children of the resurrection” (Luke 20:36).

Jesus then went on to prove that resurrection occurred in the Old Testament by using the Sadducees’ favorite Scripture from Exodus 3:6, a Scripture they would know. Jesus reminded them that when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, God said: “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” Jesus was showing them that God was using present tense, showing that these faithful men of God lived on through their faith in God.

This Scripture from Luke reminds us that through our faith in Jesus Christ we too are alive to God. Through our faith our spiritual bodies live on and we will not take the cares of the world with us in this new life. This is wonderful news!

Even before his own resurrection Jesus showed his identity of the Son of God by participating in three resurrections.

1) Jesus healed the widow’s son at Nain who passed away (Luke 7:11-17). Here there is no conversation between Jesus and the mother of the son who died. Here Jesus heard that the only son of a widow had died. He had compassion for the woman and healed her son, and he came back to life.

2) Jesus healed Jairus’ daughter (Luke 8:49-56). Again, Jesus had no direct relationship with these two people. He did tell people around him to “not fear and only believe” and she would be well. And she too was healed.

3) Lazarus (John 11:1-44). The resurrection of Lazarus was different because Jesus knew him well. In this instance, Jesus said: “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me” (John 11:41). Here we see Jesus foreshadowing his own resurrection and showing those around him that he was in fact the Son of God.

What a beautiful gift from God that we got to meet God face to face through the Word of God made flesh in Jesus Christ. The most amazing part about this second person in the Trinity is that Jesus Christ was the most personable person in the Trinity. Jesus did not show up in a pillar of cloud by day or a fire by night. He did not show up in wind and fire.

Jesus came to us in the form of a baby and lived among us to show us how to love God and others by his example. Jesus spent time with saints and sinners. He reached out to the lowly and the lost. He showed compassion and kindness where other people showed apathy and anger.

Jesus emulated the love of God the Father through giving his life for our sins and through his resurrection we can forever be connected to God. This happens with the help of the Holy Spirit of course, but you will hear more about that on week three of this series.

The question before us today is how can we show God that we are thankful for the resurrection of Jesus Christ? How can we be as Jesus described: “children of the resurrection” (Luke 20:36)?

We show that we are thankful for the resurrection when we acknowledge that there was a cost for our salvation. Jesus gave his life and died a painful death so that we could live.

But that was not the end of the story. Three days later Christ rose from the dead, defeated death, ascended to heaven, and made it possible for us to also experience resurrection through our faith in Him.

As we give thanks to God for the second person in the Trinity today, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, we acknowledge that the resurrected Christ still calls us to do the work of God today.

The past couple weeks our charge Bible Study has been studying the book of Acts. In Acts 9 we retold the story of Paul’s conversion from Saul to Paul. We heard again that on the road to Damascus Paul was confronted by the resurrection Christ who said: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

At that time, Saul was a Pharisee, and like the Sadducees he did not accept that Jesus Christ was who he said he was. We heard earlier in the book of Acts that he was directly responsible for the death of Stephen.

Yet here, in Acts 9, the resurrected Christ confronts Saul, changes his heart, and propels him into mission through the power of the Holy Spirit.

I believe that the resurrected Christ still confronts us today to continue to do the work of God.

This happens in our lives when we have moments of blindness. There are times in our lives, like the blind Saul, where we do not know where to turn. Then God in God’s mercy gives us sight to see the way forward. I wonder if you have had a Damascus road experience, a time where you felt you were going one way and God called you to go another way.

For me, I had a moment like this in college. There came a moment when I had to decide whether I would go to seminary or not. This was the hinging point of my life. You see there were many people in my life that questioned my calling to ministry, mainly because they knew it would be a life of sacrifice. Friends asked: “Are you sure you want to be a pastor?” And although God had confirmed this calling upon my heart with the affirmation of many of disciples of Christ, I did have my own moments of doubt about how everything would work out.

Then like Saul, I felt like I was confronted by the resurrected Christ.

“Don’t you know that through my resurrection you have nothing to fear Jessie” I felt Christ ask me. That moment reminded me that we are children of the resurrection when we do not fear the future but trust in the Almighty God.

We all have moments of blindness or doubt, but the good news for our lives today is that the resurrected Christ continues to call us to hope in the promise of the resurrection.

We were reminded of this last Sunday as we found encouragement through the great cloud of witnesses. We are reminded of the hope in the resurrection today through Jesus’s conversation with the Sadducees. And we are reminded of our hope in the resurrection through the Apostle Paul who said: “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. ²¹For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; ²²for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:20-22).

The moment that Jesus died, the sins of Adam that separated us from God in the first place died with him. Upon Jesus’ resurrection we were finally put back into a right relationship with God.

So today we give thanks to God for Jesus Christ, God who came in human form, to take our place so that we could have new life and salvation. This is the best gift we will ever receive.

So today, how will you show your thanks to God for the resurrection? We do this by telling God thank you every day. We do this when we share with other people about why the resurrection of Christ matters to us. I think this is why our Bible study group really enjoyed studying Acts. Every chance the Apostle Paul got he traveled to as many places as he could to share the good news of Jesus Christ. What an amazing example of someone who was grateful for the resurrection.

May we like the Apostle Paul, give thanks to God today and every day for the resurrection. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/people/who-were-the-sadducees-in-the-bible-what-were-their-beliefs.html>.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Richard Swanson. Commentary on Luke 20.

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1852