

Third Sunday of Easter - April 14, 2024

Acts 5:12–16 (or Isaiah 43:1–3a, 5–7); Psalm 50:1–6; Ephesians 1:7–14; John 5:25–29

“The trouble with resurrection”

1. There is a small town in Indiana where, if you're between the ages of 7 and 21 years old, you can come be in the circus... maybe even learn to perform the fly trapeze act
 - a. Since the late 1800s, Peru Indiana has had a circus. In fact, it's known as the Circus Capital of the World
 - b. Since 1960, it has hosted the Peru Amateur Circus every summer. Every child who wants to be a part of the circus is allowed to take part.
 - c. For about a week each July, some 200 young people perform for the 11,000 town residents (plus visitors) <https://time.com/4452906/indiana-circus-peru/>
 - d. One of the most captivating acts in the circus for me is the flying trapeze.
 - i. There are basically two swings hanging high in the circus tent, let's say one on the left and one on the right (with a safety net far below them).
 - ii. Launching from the left elevated platform, a performer swings towards the center on the left swing, while another performer on the right elevated platform flings the empty right swing towards the center.
 - iii. The performer on the left swing, with perfect timing, lets go of the left swing, flying through the air, and grabs the empty right swing in the place where the two swings almost touch in their trajectories.
 - iv. Now on the right swing, the performer is able to reach the safety of the right platform.
 - v. That's the basic trick, and of course there are variations to make it fancier and more exciting, with all sorts of twists, turns, flips, etc. in that in-between space where the performer has left one swing and will soon grab the new swing.
 - vi. Crucial to this act is that, for a brief moment, the performer has to let go of one swing if they're going to be able to get a hold of the other swing.
2. In our passage today, Jesus is teaching about resurrection (both the eventual resurrection, and a more present-day resurrection) and I think the image of the trapeze might help us unlock some meaning from his mysterious teaching.
 - a. Jesus speaks of a distinct shift in this passage, a momentous change from life to resurrection.
 - i. In that sense think of it like going from the one swing to the other
 - ii. It's going from one reality to another.
 - b. Especially at Easter, of course we think of resurrection as the moment Jesus was transformed and raised from the grave.
 - i. This, Jesus teaches, is something completely new which he would experience and usher the opportunity for the rest of us to experience too
 - ii. It makes sense for us to hear his teaching and especially the mention of judgement to think that Jesus is only referring to a far-off time in the future when there would be a final reconning before new life is ushered in.

- iii. If we were to spend more time on that concept alone, we would ponder how Jesus leads the way for us to have that same transformation, and then ponder what Jesus means by judgement – what it is that God is up to ushering in God’s sense of justice as new life comes to be.
 - c. But in all that future talk, we should not forget another sense of resurrection.
 - i. Jesus also speaks of the resurrection as being in the here and now.
 - ii. “...anyone who hears my word and believes [the one] who sent me **has eternal life**, and does not come under judgement, but **has passed from death to life**... the hour is coming, **and is now here**, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”
 - iii. Now, I have no more of an idea about what the final resurrection will be than what the present-day resurrection will be like.
 - iv. But I think we can all sense, from the way Jesus taught and lived, that there was a newness to life which he was ushering in.
 - v. It was a transformation
 - 1. not just of ideas, but of building community
 - 2. not just of actions, but of allegiances and loyalties
 - vi. To follow Jesus back then (and I would argue today) means a departure from an old life to a new life: from self-centered to God-centered, from scarcity to abundance, from fear to trust.
- 3. But the trouble with resurrection is that it requires a death first.
 - a. In the trapeze metaphor: to get from one swing to the other, there will be an in-between time. A time holding NO SWING AT ALL.
 - b. Think of that in-between time as a transition.
 - c. Theologically we can think of it like a death of what was, ON THE WAY to what will be, but not quite reaching it yet.
 - d. William Bridges, in his business book *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* breaks down the stages of transitions in an organization:
 - i. “#1 Letting go of the old ways and the old identity people had. This first phase of transition is an ending, and the time when you need to help people to deal with their losses.
 - ii. #2 Going through an in-between time when the old is gone but the new isn’t fully operational. We call this time the “neutral zone”: it’s when the critical psychological realignments and repatterning take place.
 - iii. #3 Coming out of the transition and making a new beginning. This is when people develop the new identity, experience the new energy, and discover the new sense of purpose that make the change begin to work. Bridges, William. *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*. Da Capo Press. Kindle Edition. (location 195)
 - iv. Changes of any sort—even though they may be justified in economic or technological terms—finally succeed or fail on the basis of whether the people affected **do things differently**. Do the employees let go of the old way of doing things, go through that difficult time between the old way and the new, and come out doing things the new way? If [leaders] don’t help people through these three phases, even the most wonderful training

programs often fall flat. The leaders forget endings and neutral zones; they [just] try to start with the final stage of transition. And they can't see what went wrong!" (208)

- e. Experiencing and promoting resurrection, of the kind Jesus embodied through his ministry, is something which requires facing that in-between time before reaching the life God has for us,
 - i. that moment up in the air between the two trapeze swings.
 - ii. Or more starkly: it requires that Saturday between the cross and the resurrection. It requires some sort of death.
 - f. Living out that resurrection in a real sense invites us to trust that the new life is coming and is so close we can touch it
 - i. These are our efforts to lean into the justice of God, that is, to understand the judgement of God.
 - ii. Judgement isn't to say "who's in and who's out of heaven" but rather to let go of the way humans judge (that left trapeze swing) and live by the way God judges things (that right trapeze calling out to us)
 - iii. And what are those ways of God? Well, just look at how Jesus lived his life, and how he taught, and how he wouldn't back down in the face of injustice, and how he proved God won't let death have the last word.
4. The trouble with resurrection is that it requires a death first, that unnerving moment up in the air between the two trapeze swings. The Good News is that Jesus is with us through it all.

Reflection questions:

1. Think of a time when you've found yourself in a transition, an in-between time distinct from one previous reality and the next (in between jobs, engaged but not yet married, etc.)
2. What do you make of Jesus' teaching of resurrection in John 5:25–29 sounding like a present AND a future event?
3. What has felt like new life (truly a resurrection) in your life?