

Easter 5C May 2 2010  
Graduate Recognition  
Pastor Tim Koester

## Resurrection Residue

When I was a kid, I loved to eat mulberries right off of the tree, especially one particular tree. Even though it wasn't much to look at, it had the biggest, juiciest, sweetest little bundles of purple goodness any tree could hope to have. Time would stop when I was eating mulberries. A quick stop to pick a few of them before heading into the house could turn into half an hour before I'd even realize it.

But my mother realized it.

"Where have you been," she would ask but of course she already knew the answer. Mulberries leave a **residue**, and the deep purple stains that were all over my hands, and mouth, and clothes, and even sometimes my shoes, convicted me on the spot. I tried to be careful, but that telltale **residue** managed to get on me no matter what I did.

It's been a month since we celebrated Easter. I got to wondering this week (as I was being held captive ☺), if there was any **residue of the resurrection** that remains with us as we go about our lives. Jesus has risen from the dead but does that reality make a difference in Bloomfield NE in the spring of 2010? Are we, is the world, marked with some evidence of Easter?

It's been a hard week to tell in many ways. The **residual** effects of war and violence continue to affect both soldier and civilian. Oil continues to spew from the sunken platform in the Gulf, leaving a **residue** of ecological and economic disaster. Grief **lingers** from the tragic deaths that have occurred in this community and those nearby. I'm quite certain that short tempers or judgmental attitudes have **tainted** even the relationships in this room with resentment and mistrust. What lasting effect does Easter have in the middle of such bad news? What **resurrection residue** reminds the world that CHRIST IS RISEN! **He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

Thank God for the good news we hear from Scripture today! I think **each of the texts this morning have some mulberry juice for us**. Each lesson tells about a real and lasting effect of the empty tomb that has the power to color the world with the reality of the resurrection.

The first is Peter's change of heart about a group of people thought to be outside of God's embrace. The Spirit of the risen Christ turns Peter's world upside down and Peter is confronted with the fact that **all are welcome** to receive God's grace, even those "gentile" sinners who lived a life very different from the one he and his fellow Jews practiced. The good news of Jesus Christ is good news for the whole world, not simply for those who hold the "correct" belief. Evidence of the resurrection is present in the world when people are **welcomed** to receive God's grace when previously they were shut out because of who they were or what they had done. That kind of radical openness is a mark, a residue that continues to raise up new life in this world.

The second stain of Easter, the second resurrection residue, is poetically penned in the lesson from Revelation. There is no doubt that we live in a world of hurt – a world filled with pain and suffering, shattered dreams and broken relationships.

Yet in spite of all of that – in spite of everything that has happened this week to wash away any evidence that Jesus destroyed the power of death, **HOPE** remains.

There is **hope** for a better day,

**hope** for a life beyond this one,

**hope** that God is not finished with us yet,

**hope** that **life as it is** must inevitably give way to **life as it should be**.

**Hope** is one of the enduring legacies of Easter. Hope is a purple mulberry stain we cannot avoid once we have fed on the incredible goodness of God's grace. Hope gets on us and **in** us and people take notice. **Hope** marks our lives with a residue of the resurrection that is hard to wash off because nothing, and no one, is outside of God's redemption. That gives us a power and a peace to face whatever comes in this life without fear. Hope is a mark of new life among us.

And finally, there is the most important residue of the resurrection that Jesus says will mark us as people who have encountered the grace and mercy of God. Finally and most importantly, there is **LOVE**. **Love** is all that God wants from us. "**Love** is all that Jesus wants his disciples to know and remember when he is gone: **love** one another. Not "Evangelize one another." Not "Keep each other accountable." Not "Give more money to the church." Not "Resist temptation." Not "Make me proud." Not any of the other hundred things we regularly hear lifted up as the pinnacle and priority of the Christian life, but rather this: "**Love** one another."<sup>1</sup>

Today we celebrate with these young people, a milestone of achievement in their lives. We celebrate your graduation from high school with joy and pride and yet today we also recognize that you are moving out into the world with a freedom and a potential unlike any you have experienced before. You have been gifted by God to make a difference in this world and that difference will be most evident not in what you accomplish, or build, or achieve, but in **HOW YOU LOVE**.

Love is not just a feeling or sentiment that makes you feel good.

Love is a **power** that changes the game.

Love is a **connection** to your fellow human that sees them as a part of you.

Love acts with **compassion** and **courage** on behalf of another.

It brings the gift of **life** both to the lover and the beloved.

Love is hard, there is no doubt about that but we can do this **because God is with us**.

God's love for us leaves a mark. That little cross, made on your forehead when you were baptized, **is like a gigantic purple stain we cannot rub off**. God gives us both the freedom and the power to love one another in radical new ways because God has first loved us.

So graduates, I invite you to think of us this congregation as your mulberry tree. You have feasted on the good news of God's amazing grace and now you bear the marks of the resurrection. Through you, the world will experience welcoming, and hope, and love because... Christ is risen, **He is risen indeed, Alleluia!**

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<sup>1</sup> From commentary on the gospel by David Lose; "The Lectionary this Week" at [http://www.workingpreacher.org/dear\\_wp.aspx?article\\_id=334](http://www.workingpreacher.org/dear_wp.aspx?article_id=334)