

“The Whole World” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
April 8, 2018 Second Sunday of Easter
1 John 1:1-2:2

Let us pray together: **Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.**

Please take out the sheet that is in your bulletin that has a picture on the top of it. It's an eight and one-half by eleven sheet. Does everyone have one or can share one with your neighbor?

When I saw this icon in the January 31, 2018 issue of *Christian Century* (p 22), I knew I had to share it with you because of the story it tells. You may remember from a Sunday School class of long ago that there was a time when most people in the general population could not read. So, the church turned the stories in the Bible into pictures. The priest would explain the story the picture illustrated. Seeing the picture would remind the people of the Bible story.

Now I know that all of you can read, but I liked how this picture encompasses several aspects of the resurrection – some we may not think about.

As I note on the handout, this picture, a fresco, is a visual depiction of the resurrection from an Eastern Orthodox Church in Cappadocia. Cappadocia is located in modern day Turkey. Fresco is a technique of mural painting executed upon freshly laid, or wet lime plaster. The pictures on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel are frescos. The reason Christ's face is incomplete in this fresco is because the plaster and paint have flaked away exposing the blank wall underneath.

Look at the bold wording under the picture. I would like to draw your attention to the first few words there: **Christ's Resurrection/Anastasis**. We are familiar with the term resurrection, but not the other word – anastasis. Anastasis is Greek for resurrection, but also means rising up. Interesting to think of the resurrection as a rising up. God certainly raised Jesus from the dead and the results of the resurrection was and is the 'rising up' of Christianity.

Let's look at the central figure – Christ with a halo around his head. What is Christ doing in the picture? Look at his right hand. **Christ is holding the arm of a man. That man is Adam.** Behind Adam is Eve. You may not be able to see this, but both Adam and Eve are being pulled from a tomb or burial chamber. Christ is saving humanity. The six heads you see behind Adam and Eve are the prophets.

Through the resurrection, Jesus saves all humanity, represented here by Adam, Eve and the prophets.

Do you see the dark area at the bottom of the picture? Jesus' feet are on something that appears dark and sinister. When we say the Apostles' Creed on Communion Sundays, we leave out a part of the Creed that says Jesus descended into hell. The phrase is: 'was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell, and on the third day he rose from the dead.' I don't know how long that phrase, 'he descended into hell' has been left out of our recitation of the Apostles' Creed.

Descended into hell has been taken to mean that Christ's resurrection was victory over death. Indeed, that is what is illustrated in this picture. Jesus is coming out of the darkness or Hades, the abode of the dead. The dark and sinister figure under Jesus' feet is Satan or the ruler of Hades. **Christ is standing on a figure that stands for Satan.** This picture illustrates Christ's victory over death. You can see the bottom of Jesus' ceremonial cross is on top of the head of Satan, whose hand and feet are in chains. The gold X figure to the right represents the doors to Hades that Jesus had broken through. Scattered in this corner of the picture are also chains and locks which were a part of the door that Jesus has broken down.

The two figures on the right, one bearded and the other younger, are Solomon and David. You may remember that Jesus came from the line of David, Israel's greatest king.

This picture illustrates the crucified and risen Christ forcibly breaking into Hades, destroying the door to Hades along with its chains and locks, chaining Satan and liberating all humanity - personified in Adam and Eve being pulled from their tombs – freeing all humanity from the prison of death.

What I like about this picture is that it illustrates that Jesus came to save all people, all humanity, all creation. We tend to think of our salvation as personal. Yes, it is, but Jesus came to save all people. That is what is illustrated in this picture. As was pointed out in last week's sermon and scripture, God shows no partiality.

In our scripture today from First John, we read that John writes about what he has heard, what he has seen with his own eyes, what he has touched – that being the risen Lord. John didn't need a picture to help him understand the resurrection. He was there when it happened.

John's message is that we no longer live in darkness. The picture we've looked at calls that darkness Hades. We no longer need to fear death. We, along with Adam and Eve, have been pulled from our tombs to life eternal. All humanity has been freed from the prison of death.

John cares deeply for those he is writing to in this letter from First John. He wants them and us to know what he has experienced so you and I can walk in the light. That light being the light of Jesus. The picture we just looked at shows this beautifully. Jesus is in the light. Those whom he rescues are in the light with him.

John says there is no darkness in Jesus. We see that in the picture. Jesus has overcome the darkness.

Perhaps the one thing the picture of Christ's resurrection misses is what John talks about: sin and Jesus' atonement for our sins. As John writes, Jesus **“is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”**

Yes, Jesus pulls us from the tomb and gives us eternal life. But Jesus' death and resurrection also gives us forgiveness of sins. **“If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** That's how the call to confession was presented today and that's why we confess our sins each Sunday – for God's forgiveness. That forgiveness is available to all because of what Christ did by dying on the cross.

Our faith is based on Christ's resurrection from the dead. John encountered the risen Christ. John tells us his story in these verses from First John. The picture we looked at explains another aspect of the resurrection. The picture shows us that through Jesus' resurrection, death was conquered for all. John explains that through Jesus' death our sins and the sins of the whole world are forgiven. No wonder the first century Christians so boldly answered the question why they believed that Jesus was the son of God with the word, 'because Jesus was raised from the death.'

You're heard what John has to say about the resurrection. You've looked at a picture that describes the results of the resurrection. You can understand the story the picture tells. What about you? What does the resurrection mean to you?

Take this picture home and put it up some place where you can see it. Reread the scripture lesson from today. This coming week, think about what God and Jesus accomplished for you and all humanity through Jesus' resurrection.