

**“Preaching the Empty Tomb to an Empty Room” St. Mary’s EI, 5/9/20**

The sermon I’ll be preaching was born on the evening we were unveiling Dr. Gorman’s Festschrift. One of the presenters read a quote from Richard Hays, from Dr. Gorman’s book, *Participating in Christ* (p. 255),

On the issue of resurrection, many preachers and New Testament scholars are unwitting partisans of the Sadducees. Because they deny the truth of Scripture’s proclamation that God raised Jesus from the dead—or waffle about it—they leave the church in a state of uncertainty, lacking confidence in its mission, knowing neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. [Hays, “Reading Scripture in Light of Resurrection” in Hays and Davis, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture*, 216]

The article emphasizes the importance of the bodily resurrection, and its centrality in our hope as Christians, as well as the importance of its power for living the Jesus life in the world today. It focuses on Paul’s words in I Cor. 15. I’ve decided to take I Cor. 15 my text this Sunday, rather than one of the lectionary texts.

Several things drew my attention to **this** text for **this** Easter. First, the detailed case Paul makes for bodily resurrection feels like a balm for spirits this Easter. Flesh matters to God. God takes our physical lives seriously! We need to hear that when our bodies feel vulnerable and fragile. These fragile forms we strive to keep healthy, this aging flesh with its aches and strains, God makes our vulnerable bodies part of our ultimate salvation.

It is GOD who does this; God **raised** Jesus from the dead. “He **was raised** on the third day.” God took on flesh in Jesus; God suffered on the cross in Jesus; God raised Jesus. God participates in our humanity and vulnerability. As God raised Jesus, so God raises us. When it’s beyond our control, God acts.

That’s as far as I’ve gotten on the sermon. The other topic we were assigned is the “empty room”. This is the first time we’ve preached virtually on Easter Sunday. How will that make your sermon different? Most of us rely on the joyful emotion of Easter, a full house and lilies. This year many of you will pre-record your sermon. I will preach mine live in real time on Zoom. Whichever we do, it’s not the same. From what I can tell, attention spans are shorter for an on line sermon. I do a couple of things to adjust.

**One**, I shorten the sermon. **Two**, I work with plainer, simpler prose. I'm not wowing people with style, I'm speaking to raw emotions. People will be wanting to feel Easter, but they'll also be feeling fear and dread and grief. That's complicated! Simplify your prose. Count on people clinging to your words, and clinging to each other as they listen to your words. **Three**, I try to make "eye contact" as much as possible. Many of us use a MS, but it seems even more important in a virtual venue to look at the camera and be conversational. Its another way of being personal.