

It behooves us to listen to our children if we want the church to become what we are meant to be. One of our little boys said something on Easter that I am still thinking about. For now, this is what I've come up with. This sermon is based on Adam's words and a reading from Acts 9:36-43, and is entitled "From the Mouth of A Six Year Old."

Kate

Okay, here's the truth...since Easter Sunday I have been poked, prodded, and challenged by a comment made by a six year old boy to his grandmother. Little Adam told Nancy Brown that he did not want to go to church on Easter because he did not believe that anyone could rise from the dead. This little one has been around death – with his veterinarian parents and all the pets, including a recent beloved dog of his grandparents. And not a single one of them came back!

And so, it is not surprising that when I read our reading from Acts about the raising of Tabitha, my thoughts went to Adam. If he were here, would he stomp out? And what, what would any **one** of us tell him if he told you in his small but keenly observant voice, "I just can't believe all this nonsense!"

I would have to respond honestly. "No, Adam, I have not seen anyone or any creature rising from the dead. **But** I have seen resurrection. I have seen people revive; I have seen whole communities come back to life, because of the love of one person." Now the mind of a six year old, even a very bright one like Adam's, can only go so far. Advanced six year olds are immersed in concrete operations on the developmental scale, and so he would know immediately "That is **not** the same thing!" Death is death. Life is life. There is nothing in-between. All is black or all is white. But is everything black and white in this life? Is Easter simply about the resurrection of a corpse? If so, I might have to walk out with Adam.

I might have to walk out on our Acts reading today if **all** it is about is the resuscitation of Tabitha. But it is not. It is about so much more than that. It is about a changed community, a risen community, a community of hope. In order to see that, though, we have to know a little more about Tabitha and her group of widows. Among the most powerless and marginalized in society in

Jesus' time were the widows. Women were low enough, but when connected to a man they had a small amount of acquired status as well as a means to make a living. But a widow not only had lost all this and found themselves destitute, but were also avoided unless their very presence would spread their fate to others, as if they had a communicable disease. Throughout the Bible, we hear a concern for the poor widow.

Now we don't know if Tabitha herself was a widow, but we do know that she was devoted to good works and acts of charity. And clearly, those acts had **clothed** the women she worked with in **dignity**. When Peter comes in, the women begin "showing tunics and other clothing that Tabitha had made while she was with them." In the Greek, it is clear that they showed Peter these things by wearing them. And just the fact that this group took it upon themselves to send for Peter, the *rock* star of the apostles, at the death of their friend tells us that these women were not playing the role society had granted them. They were women of strength and purpose and their beloved friend had died. Once **objects** of charity at best, they were now helping themselves. Tabitha was not the only one raised here.

After this, we are told that Peter moved on to stay with Simon, the tanner – which sounds innocuous enough until you realize that Simon's occupation puts him in the same realm of the unclean, the marginalized, the despised. Having worked with the blood of animals, Simon had a similar status as did the women. Is this just a coincidence? No. The only reason we may think so is our minds are so focused on the raising of one dead, the impossible act, that we don't see the rest of the story. The impossible possible is happening all around it. Whole communities of the powerless and the marginalized, are being raised. Perhaps we are so distanced from what it meant to be a widow or a tanner in Jesus' time, that we are missing the whole point, and it is this: **Lives** given over to **love** have the **power**, even in

death, to raise whole communities to new life.

So, my question: Are we telling our children the **whole story**? Because, you know, they are pretty astute observers of adults. If they hear something that just doesn't sound right to them, you'll hear about it! My mom recently told me the story of great-grandchild Maddy who when it came time for the sermon in church, raised her four year old voice so all could hear – "Why does he always talk about the same thing? It is so annoying!" She's been listening. And so has Adam. And so, what do we tell them?

There are many different theological understandings of what happened at the resurrection. That really won't help here – our kids won't understand them, and if we are honest, neither do many of us. And so, it won't work to try to **tell** them what it is about. But **showing** them...that's **different**. Take them to the Soup Kitchen where the Christ lives as every person coming to be fed is treated with dignity, and leaves more ready to face the world. Take them to a Habitat for Humanity site made possible by its birth at Koinonia farm, a small interracial Christian community outside Americus, Georgia, in a time and place where anything interracial was pretty much a miracle, where Millard and Linda Fuller were inspired to leave their successful business life and begin a life of Christian service.

Take them to a prayer vigil for victims of the Boston Marathon bombings and its aftermath, because people who are gathered in **love**, even after such a tragedy, find themselves stronger, more compassionate, and bound together in an energy that moves them to serve others. Boston is rising today. Not because they caught the criminals, but because of all the **acts** of love that were perpetrated in the wake of death and the face of danger. It's powerful, it's miraculous, it's resurrection.

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And finally, take the children to church. **Not** to hear a message they cannot believe. But to feel the love and energy that flows through a risen community. And **this** is where the **rubber hits the road**. **Are we truly a risen community** like the group of widows in our readings today? Or are we simply a group of people who profess belief in resurrection? There is a difference, and our young people know it...as soon as they walk in the door. Are they embraced with joy? Or tolerated? Are they given an esteemed place? Or kept in "proper" place? Do they get caught up in the energy of others engaged in joyful service to one another and the wider community? Or do they get roped into another "church thing"?

There's a difference. They know it and so do we. When we proclaim that Christ is risen, we are not only professing a belief about the past, but claiming that the love that embraced the children, healed the leper, gave dignity to the widows, drew in the outcast, forgave the sinner, set down the sword, raised up the poor, and gathered all around one table – that **this love lives and breathes here**. Not as a belief – but as a physical, tangible, effective reality. It is not solely the responsibility of Nancy and Paul to tell Adam what resurrection is about. It is **our responsibility to live it before his eyes**. And it really doesn't matter what is said over and over again to Maddy, it matters what she feels and sees and gets invited into. If we live as the risen community, with the love of Christ shining through our eyes and flowing through our veins, no words will be necessary. The one who died will rise up right inside them. Inside all of us. Amen.

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