

## “Stand Firm, Hold Fast”

Haggai 2:1-9; *Psalm 145*; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17; Luke 20:27-38

The gospel text shares the narrative of a conversation between Jesus and a group of Sadducees who question him about the resurrection. It reminds me of story a friend shared with me about what happens to us at the end of life.

Once upon a time a golfer was standing on the first tee, took a mighty swing and hit his ball into a clump of trees. He found his ball and saw an opening between two trees he thought he could hit through. Taking out his 3-wood, the golfer took another mighty swing. The ball hit a tree, bounced back, hit him in the forehead and to the surprise and shock of his friends who had never seen anything like this before, the golfer fell down and died on the spot.

A moment later, as the unfortunate golfer approached the gates of heaven, St. Peter happened to be standing there and upon learning about the terrible accident he asked, “My friend, are you a good golfer?” The man replied, “Got here in two, didn’t I?”

Now, we move on to a more serious approach to the gospel. Luke writes about the last time Jesus is in Jerusalem and it is especially dangerous. In opposition to the crowds who overwhelmingly welcome Jesus and the message of the gospel, there are also people who despise Jesus, who challenge and mock his wisdom, who are sadly jealous of his popularity, and who therefore quietly organize, plot and work behind the scenes to have him arrested and executed.

It is in the midst of this explosive tension that Jesus is asked a question about the resurrection by a group of religious elite who don’t even believe in the resurrection. True to form, Jesus sees through their shallow sarcasm, accepts the challenge of their inquiry, and speaks about God who is not of the dead, but of the living. In the course of this brief narrative, Jesus identifies his followers as “children of the resurrection.” The Sadducees do not know what to do or how to respond other than “they no longer dared to ask him another question.”

We as Christians are “children of the resurrection.” In the middle part of the first century, Christians were under fire from individuals and groups everywhere who for whatever reason could not comprehend or accept the message of the gospel. It was a time of change and transition, religious persecution and martyrdom. But the Jesus movement of the Way continued to grow and develop as it infiltrated the political arena of power from Jerusalem to Rome and beyond in addition to ultimately changing the religious landscape. Nothing could stop it or slow it down except, maybe, one thing and the Apostle Paul knew exactly what that one thing was. It was deception, the intentional activity by some to question the authenticity of personal accounts about Jesus and the subsequent effort to water down the mystery of the gospel. Paul, however, met the problem head on. “Sisters and brothers,” he wrote to the early church, “stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.” Stand firm and hold fast to the traditions.

Paul makes a case for the place of tradition in our lives, not the tradition that is merely recognized and practiced out of meaningless and boring habit, but tradition that is grounded and rooted in the person of Jesus Christ, that follows the pattern of what Jesus did in his own life, what he taught and how he treated his neighbor, often with a heart filled with compassion and a tender love that rendered the power of grace. According to Paul, we are to stand firm and hold fast in the traditions we have been taught, which are the traditions of Jesus.

The morning lessons have special meaning. Kay and I received news early last week that a special person, my "Aunt Betty," took the outstretched hand of Jesus last Sunday and made her way to the Church Triumphant. When I was born, my mother was seriously ill, so sick she remained hospitalized for over a year unable to care for me. Her older brother and his new bride of less than two weeks assumed responsibility for my well-being. I only recently heard the story about their trip to meet family in New Jersey who were quite surprised to see newlyweds showing up with a two week old baby in their arms. They had some explaining to do. Newlyweds. Baby. What's the story behind this?

These two Christian people influenced who I am today. I was nearly six years of age when I first learned they were not my father and mother. My mother had remarried. There was the birth of a half-sister. My life changed, dramatically, as I experienced a new family, a new community, but the same traditions that I had been taught my first six years. My uncle, Tom Freeman, died eleven years ago. My aunt, Betty Freeman, after ninety plus years on this earth died last Sunday. She and my uncle never forced-fed me the Christian faith. Instead, they were the first people to instill in me, in a good and gracious way, the traditions of Jesus. I was baptized in the Name of the Trinity, nurtured in the life of the church, read to by way of stories from the Bible, taught how to bow my head and fold my hands in reverence saying grace at the table, and saying my evening prayers at night, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take."

William Riley, Tom and Betty Freeman, Dick Jones are "children of the resurrection." Rhodes Cuppia and all of our children and youth are "children of the resurrection." You and I are "children of the resurrection" and we are challenged today to stand firm and hold fast to the traditions we have been taught, by word of mouth or by the apostolic witness of the early church.

Sam shared an interesting poster Friday afternoon as it addresses all baseball fans of the Chicago Cubs, winners of the 7<sup>th</sup> and deciding game of the World Series. What a game that was with major shifts in momentum, extra innings, high-stakes drama, all sorts of second-guessing. The poster is colorful and very simple. Against a blue background is a bold upper case C with a bear cub in the middle. At the top of the poster are the words, "If you made any promises in the bottom of the 9<sup>th</sup>..." And at the bottom, "Services are Sunday at 8, 9 and 11 am." In the end, it really does matter why we're here this morning. There is something to be said about listening to people like an ancient prophet, the apostolic witness of the early church, and most certainly Jesus, the most important of all, as we continue to learn the tradition of what it means to be "children of the resurrection" in the spirit of Christian community. Amen.