



SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE
in the City of New York
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector
www.SaintThomasChurch.org

May 2, 2021
The Fifth Sunday of Easter

Festal Evensong
3pm

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A Sermon by
Father Mark Brown, *Assisting Priest*
on
Leviticus 8:1-13, 30-36; Matthew 7:7-14
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A Sermon for the Fifth Sunday of Easter

I've always had a soft spot for the paintings of Norman Rockwell. In the house where I grew up there was usually a stack of a few weeks' worth of Life Magazines and Saturday Evening Posts sitting around somewhere. Rockwell did a lot of cover illustrations for the Post, including one he did in 1961 called "The Golden Rule". A few years later it was made into a mosaic for the United Nations Headquarters just a few blocks from here.

Rockwell, like many other thoughtful Episcopalians, had read up a bit about other world religions and realized that most of them have some version of the Golden Rule as ethical guidance. *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.* Rockwell's painting is a kind of collage of people of different races and ethnicities and religions. And the Rule itself is stenciled in over the figures--in gold, of course.

Today we hear the version of the Golden Rule from the Sermon on the Mount. "*In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.*" The ethical guidance of the Jewish tradition in a nutshell, a summary of the law and the prophets.

The Golden Rule is not uniquely Christian, but there is a uniquely Christian way to understand it. In this season, in these 50 days of Easter, we see through the lens of resurrection. So, what might the Golden Rule have to do with resurrection?

Some years ago I was part of a sermon series. The topic was assigned: I was to give a sermon on the message of Jesus. Which struck me as odd, since just about every sermon has to do with the message of Jesus. So, I decided to give myself a little challenge: to condense the overall message of Jesus into as few words as possible.

What could I imagine Jesus saying that would summarize his whole message? I came up with five words. With five more for clarification. The message of Jesus? "Join me in the

resurrection”. (Five words.) And the five more for clarification: “Don’t wait ‘til you’re dead.” Join me in the resurrection--don’t wait ‘til you’re dead.

Resurrection, of course, refers to something that happened to Jesus. It refers to something we believe will happen to us when we pass from this life. But Resurrection is an even larger mystery. For those who pray the Rosary, the Resurrection is the first of what are called the five Glorious Mysteries. The Mysteries are like onions with many layers of meaning. Some layers have to do with what happened to Jesus; some have to do with what will happen to us in eternity.

But Resurrection also pertains to the things of this life: it’s getting out of the tombs, out of the dark, confining spaces of our lives, and out into the broad daylight. Out of the degradation of tombs and into the fullness of light and life of a larger way of being. Resurrection literally means to stand up again. It’s about standing up to our full height and dignity as human beings made in the image of God.

The moral and ethical guidance of the Scriptures can be seen as ways of leading us out into that larger, brighter, more expansive way of being—even in this present life, even among the things of this world. The Golden Rule is about all that. It’s about living larger, living lighter and brighter, living more expansively, being more connected and interconnected.

Remember the story of the raising of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha and a close friend of Jesus. The two sisters and Jesus are at the tomb of Lazarus some days after his burial, along with other friends and family and people of the community.

Jesus says, “*Lazarus, come out!*” And he does—but he’s still bound by the winding cloths of burial. Jesus then says, “*Unbind him.*” [John 11:43-44] You, the family and friends of Lazarus, you, the community: you unbind him.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. On another occasion Jesus took it up a notch in another summary of the law: *love your neighbor as yourself*. We are called by Christ to love one another, to love our neighbors as ourselves, to help in unbinding one another. In love to help one another out of the tombs, out of the dark, confining places of life. In love to help one another stand tall to our full height. In love to help one another out of the degradation of whatever tombs confine us: poverty, illness, addiction. Political oppression, racist ideologies. In love to help one another out of all that confines us in places of darkness and death and decay.

Christian ethics and morality is not just a matter of personal piety or individual holiness. The guidance of Scripture calls us out of our narcissistic and solipsistic tendencies, out of so-called rugged individualism, and into a relational way of being. Since we are social, relational beings, there are inevitably social, relational and ultimately even political dimensions of living into resurrection life.

Which none of us can do alone. Because we’re not alone. We are, all of us, at some deep, mysterious level interconnected in a transcendent unity. This morning we heard Jesus say “*I*

am the vine; you are the branches.” [John 15:5] We are branches of a vine, connected, grounded, rooted in the same eternal reality. Each of us rooted and grounded in the same Divine life and light and love.

It is a unity we share—whether we are conscious of it or not. The same life force, the same love force, the same light source courses through the veins of every human being. As the Gospel of John puts it: *“What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.”* [John 1:4] And this Living Word of God, this living light and life of God incarnate in Jesus Christ said to Martha: *“I am the Resurrection and the life.”* [John 11:25]

“Join me in the resurrection—don’t wait ’til you’re dead.” My in-a-nutshell version of the message of Jesus. If we would join him in the resurrection, we cannot do it alone. But if we lift each other up, if we unbind one another, helping one another stand to our full height and dignity as human beings made in the image of God, doing unto others as we would have them do unto us, well, then--then we enter more deeply, more fully into that larger, more expansive life that as Dante put it, is the *“love that moves the sun and the other stars”*.

Resurrection is nothing less than the largest, most expansive way to live.

Alleluia! Praise him who is the light, the life and the love that inundates the cosmos and moves the sun and stars, the One who is himself Resurrection and Life. *“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.”* [Romans 11:36]

Amen and alleluia.