

John 14:18-23 ~ Acts 9:32-42

Get Up and Make Your Bed!

May 12, 2019 ~ Confirmation/Communion/Mother's Day/5th Sunday of Easter

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I am about to let you in on a Davis Family Secret...Emily (our eldest daughter) had a closet in her bedroom, with a very unique feature. The closet is shallow—maybe only a foot deep. But on the left side, which could not be seen from the closet door, instead of a wall there is a narrow little door that leads into another large room! We called it, “The Secret Room.” Emily was 6 years old when we bought this home in Springfield, Ohio and immediately upon discovering there was a secret room behind this closet, claimed this bedroom as hers!

I must confess, over the 24 years we lived there, it evolved (or I should say “devolved”) from a handy, dry upstairs attic space/play space with a few boxes stacked neatly under the eaves, to a catchall junk room. Since it takes some doing to squirm around the corner and truly enter it, we found it much easier to just throw whatever, through the door, knowing it would have a soft landing. Yes: it became a mess. We really only cleaned it up twice in two decades, and young adult Emily volunteered to fly back from Brooklyn, New York the summer before we moved to Wisconsin, just to help us tackle this chaos a.k.a archaeological dig through Davis family history.

So of course, we never talked about this room or showed it to guests. Well, adult guests. Our daughters discovered early on that it was a definite feature and point of interest for their sleepover parties. Not only that this secret room behind Emily's closet suggested the magic of CS Lewis' book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; but also, that adults who appeared to be in charge could allow such a room to exist under their watch. Now I'm sure all of your attics are shipshape. And that you can't imagine having a space so disordered in your house. Or in your pastor's house. Are we not, “do everything decently and in order” Presbyterians? Maybe you have one little closet where you don't dare open the door for fear of what might come bursting out and attack you if you do. Maybe you don't call it “The Secret Room” but you certainly don't open it for guests, or talk about it from the pulpit on a Sunday morning in church.

Whatever state of order or chaos you left your literal home or apartment in this morning; whether you have a “Secret Room” or not, our scripture lessons in John's Gospel and Luke's Book of Acts, tell tales of people whose *lives* have been upended, if not already ended: We heard in John, a few words from Jesus' Farewell discourse to the disciples, as they were still at table having just shared their Last Supper and before Jesus headed out to the Garden of Gethsemane before his arrest. Then in Acts, we found ourselves on the road with the Apostle Peter in the early, early days of the church-circuit riding for Christ and happening upon Aeneas in Lydda, and then called to come quickly for an emergency assist in Joppa. Yes, we see in both of these stories the messy side of life.

Our scriptures shine a light on them right when their lives are a hot mess. Yet, there is Jesus. With them in the mess. Yes, this is a messy sermon about our secret rooms and unmade beds: right here on Mother's Day/Confirmation Sunday. If you take home just one thing from this sermon, I pray it is this: Jesus is with us in the mess. True to his promise, Jesus *did not* leave us orphaned. Any of us: Children, Teenagers, Adults. No matter what you believe, no matter if you have ignored or dismissed him: Jesus is with you in the mess. Whether you feel like your life is a hot or lukewarm mess. Perhaps you have friends or family mucking through the valley of hot mess, Jesus is right there with them too. Or maybe right now you are *more* worried about the hot and hotter mess climate change is causing, or about our country's accelerating political dysfunction. Yes: Jesus is in the middle of all that, too. How do I know that? And what difference does it make? We'll get there soon.

First, let's dial it back to the scene with Peter, commanding, Aeneas, bed-ridden for eight years: "Get up and make your bed!" We are told he immediately got up. But the bed is never mentioned again. I don't think he made his bed. Well it had been years. Maybe he forgot how. More likely he was too amazed to bother. I was struck by this detail. Not because it gives all parents a biblical warrant to tell their children to make their beds (It's in the Bible, Acts 9:34.) Or because it offers the extremely clever child license to retort, "But the preacher said that Aeneas didn't make his bed." No, that's not it, either.

Rather, I was struck by the juxtaposition of the command to "get up" which is the same verb in Greek as the word for resurrection (*anastasis*), coupled with the routine, everyday task of making our bed. Here's the crazy connection I see in these stories: the Creator of the Universe, the Maker of all we have and are, is also the God of small things, even the very small unseen, rarely commented or preached upon things. Yes, the One who has counted every hair on our heads, has also counted the hair that has fallen from our heads and is stopping up the shower drain. What's my point? Our wild and crazy God can be found, wants to be found, dwells or abides in the domestic push and pull of our everyday lives. In fact, this is where resurrection begins. The new life in Christ, the still more excellent way, God's way, for each of us and all of us rises up out of the mess. Did I lose you on that leap from the shower drain to universal salvation?

Here comes another leap, so hold onto your hats. You may be settling into the idea that this is a messy, but cozy sermon about homes and sharing chores with Jesus because he's right there in the mess of it. Yes, that is part of it. But that is not all of it. Here on the 4th^h Sunday of Easter, also known as Eastertide, we are four weeks deep into the Christian season of *Cosmic Spring Cleaning*. Marcus Borg, in his book titled *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach about Jesus' Final Days in Jerusalem*, identifies Jesus' last week on this earth: his passion, death and Resurrection, as God's

Spring cleaning of the World. This phase began when God birthed Jesus on this earth and proclaimed that the kingdom of God is at hand.

Jesus did not come to this earth to do it alone: this Cosmic Spring Cleaning is a collaborative project. As Borg explains: “It was not, as it might have been imagined, an instantaneous flash of divine light, but an interactive process between divinity and humanity, a joint operation between God and ourselves... It is not that we wait for God, but that God waits for us. That is why... Jesus does not travel alone, but always, always with those companions who represent us all, the named ones who fail him and the unnamed ones who do not.”ⁱ And today we have four of our young people who are ready to profess their faith before us all and to say “yes” to joining in on this Cosmic Spring Cleaning. The curriculum we used with our confirmation class all year is titled: “Colaborate.” God has been waiting for you four! O Happy Day. Let the collaboration begin.

And yes, here about 2000 years later, their help is needed. Our confirmands are signing on at the perfect time. According to renowned religious writer, Phyllis Tickle, the Christian church is going through its every 500-year rummage sale. Last time we had one, it started in 1517 when Martin Luther posted his laundry list of 95 Theses in Wittenberg Germany, things the church would have to change or get rid of, in order to clean up its act and get back on track with what Christ really suffered, died and was resurrected for.ⁱⁱ

Whether we consider the brokenness and messiness of our world, our church, or our individual lives, the core truth here is that underneath the mess is goodness. Something or someone who is a mess, didn’t start out that way. Spring cleaning and rummage sales return us to our truest selves: who we were created to be. Resurrection brings us back to the Garden of Eden, the garden of equity, the garden of peace and justice, where everyone has a good place and purpose. That is God’s very good original creation. With Jesus leading the way, we can get up and remember what we were called to be: whether we are pulleys, buttonholes, tanners or tailors.

It all starts with resurrection, with grace and mercy in the quiet corners, the messy secret rooms of our souls: as we heard Jesus say to his disciples in John 14, ‘Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.’ Really? “Make our home with them?” How daily, how common and ordinary, how unremarkable to think about Jesus, to think about God, as homemaker: there with us scraping carrots, scouring pans, purging dead food from the refrigerator; pairing socks, sorting the recycling. Yes: Emmanuel, God With Us, Christ abiding with us right where we live.

Let’s be honest: Like it or not, a big part of homemaking involves washing and cleaning: the rooms in our houses, the dishes we cook with, our bodies. From the day they are born, we bathe our children whether they like it or not. Did you ever have a

child who did not like to take baths? Our first-born, early on developed an aversion to having her hair washed. She didn't mind the body so much, but the hair she hated, "please daddy, no!" Her two-year old plea at bath time became, "Body only! Body only, daddy!" And so of course, just to tease her, my husband Bob would say, "Oh no, Emily. Today you get to have a "hair only" bath!!

What about you and me? We have been baptized, cleansed by the power of the Holy Spirit completely and perfectly. But maybe there is some part of our lives, some part of us that we really don't want to be messed with or changed. Maybe a bad habit, a destructive relationship, a lingering bitterness, a slow-burning resentment, that needs to be cleaned and resurrected, a bed made up—but not just yet.

What about us as a church, or as Presbyterians, or as Americans? Is there a part of our lives that we'd rather not let the "Get Up and Make Your Bed" Jesus really mess with? Change is scary, Transformation is painful, especially at first. And in real life, it's jerky, unpredictable: hardly a straight path forward, this healing of our hearts, our homes, our communities. Nor does it usually happen as quickly as we'd like. Aeneas was paralyzed for eight long, slow years before he was healed. Anne Lamott, bestselling one-of-a-kind spiritual writer, in her book, *Hallelujah Anyway*, wrote about her journey of "getting up and making her bed" in this story about her baptism: "I had converted to Christianity while drunk, at a tiny church, and about a year later, several months sober, I was baptized. My pastor was a tall, brilliant, progressive preacher named James Noel, who looked a lot like Marvin Gaye, which was only part of the reason I kept coming back. I called him the morning of my baptism to tell him that, regrettably, I'd have to cancel the baptism, as I was currently too damaged and foul for words. I promised to call him when I got a bit better. He said to get [myself] over to church, that I wasn't going to heal sitting alone on my ten-by-twelve-foot houseboat. He said I didn't have to get it together before I could be included and, in fact, couldn't get it together without experiencing inclusion. So...I got baptizedⁱⁱⁱ

What is God calling you to get up and do today? We have four confirmands who are saying "yes" count me in, this day. Today we affirm them and are invited to reaffirm our own commitment to Christ. Sometimes we are the person in the bed; other times we are the ones being called to offer the hand. What resurrection work is Christ standing there, waiting for us to step up and get working on together? What secret room of your soul do you need to open up to Christ today? Bring all this to the Table, where Jesus is waiting. Open your heart, especially the messy part. God's spring cleaning of the world, depends upon it.

ⁱ Marcus J. Borg & John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach about Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2006), 187.

ⁱⁱ Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 16.

ⁱⁱⁱ Anne Lamott, *Hallelujah Anyway: Rediscovering Mercy* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2017), 148-149.