

Presente

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Richard C. Allen

November 4, 2007

South Glastonbury

Connecticut

There is a story I have told from this pulpit on a number of occasions. It is one of those stories I heard twenty five years ago, and when I heard it, I knew I was hearing a truth that would shape my faith forever. So, I like to return to this story now and again. I find it appropriate as we celebrate the Communion meal and also as we honor those men and women of faith who have died over the past year.

During the civil war in El Salvador in the early 1980's, the violence in the villages reached a horrific level of terror. Death squads raided peasants in their homes, killing women and children and the older, disabled men. At the onset of darkness each night, the terror intensified. So, each morning, the villagers gathered at the local church not knowing who was still alive. And the priest would call the roll of the local citizens. One by one, people would hear their name and cry out, "Presente!" I am here. But when the priest read a name and there was a long silence, someone else in the sanctuary would call out, "Presente." She is here. Her spirit is here. Her love is here. Her strength is here.

When I heard this story, it was as if I had always known ABOUT the Resurrection; but in that moment of hearing the witness of those villagers, I believed in the Resurrection.

So I am imagining the disciples gathering in some secluded spot in the days following the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. I picture them huddled together and maybe Thomas is calling the roll:

Simon Peter, Andrew, James son of Zebedee, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew the tax collector, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Canaanite. Each one answers “Presente.” Then, Thomas calls out, Jesus of Nazareth. There is a long silence, and then from everyone’s lips, “Presente.” Christ is risen! Christ is here! Christ’s love and strength and compassion are here!

This has always been the blessed announcement at the Communion table, “Presente,” Christ is present at the table, present in the bread, present in the cup, present in the hearts and minds of all who have gathered.

The South Church roll goes back to 1836. I am going to call out some names of people who don’t appear to be here, but we know better. Of course they are here! When I speak each name, would you all cry out, “Presente!”

Pardon Brown! Rheta Clark! Bertha Phau! John Ramaker! Elizabeth Clark! Reverend Robert Reitingner! Austin Sheldon! Reverend Wesley Ewert! Ted Olmstead! Terry Erk! Mary Thurmond! Ed Greenstreet! Marian Standish!

The list goes on and on. What I know is that the love of each believer, each doubter, each saint is present in ways we hardly know how to name, is present in ways that give us courage when the road seems too long, is present when the pain seems unbearable, is present when the mountain seems insurmountable.

Today is a Communion Sunday. I would just have you know that I believe in the Resurrection and that the love of Christ is present in the breaking of the bread, and that the loves of our lives are present, too. In the greatest of hope, Amen.