

One Big Sunday - 10 Year Anniversary

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 May 2023

Preachers: TONETTA LANDIS-AINA, ANTHONY PARROTT

[0 : 0 0] All right, so today what we want to do on this one big Sunday, Pastor Anthony and I want to take a little bit of time to do something different, something different from a regular sermon.

We want to spend a few minutes wrapping up the series that we've been in for the past few weeks, practicing resurrection. And we want to wrap that up with some personal reflection.

But we also want to take some time to think about how practicing resurrection in our relationships with God has deeply affected how we think about the vision of this community.

So we're kind of doing two things today as we move. So I'm going to start a little bit more formally and by the end of things we'll be riffing, hopefully Anthony and I will be almost at that place we are on Tuesday mornings when we meet together and we're saying all kinds of things, both really, really good and like really, really that need some revision.

So hopefully, hopefully we'll get to that place. But I was thinking about this past series that we've been in. And I realized that there was just some things that were riding underneath the surface for me each week as I prepared my sermon.

[1 : 2 9] And I really wanted to lift up before we moved out of this series. And I think it plays a little bit into this vision piece. So I've been thinking a lot more about how this idea of having an enchanted faith, this resurrected relationship with God, this good theology with a deep spirituality that is about the heart and the body.

I've been thinking a lot about how that connects to me being a black woman. And I've realized as I've been writing these past few weeks that it kind of has for me everything to do with me being a black woman, this restoration of my heart.

There's a song by a group I love. Some of you might have heard them. They're called Sweet Honey in the Rock. And I love them. And they have this song called I Remember, I Believe that pretty much sums up how I think about this restoration of heart that I have felt myself experiencing these last few years.

Here's a little bit of how it goes. I don't know how my mother walked her trouble down. I don't know how my father stood his ground. I don't know how my people survived slavery.

I do remember. That's why I believe. I don't know how the rivers overflow their banks. I don't know how the snow falls and covers the ground.

[3 : 0 5] I don't know how the hurricane sweeps through the land every now and then. Standing in a rainstorm, I believe. I don't know how the angels woke me up this morning soon.

I don't know how the blood still flows through my veins. I don't know how I woke to run another day. Standing in a rainstorm, I believe.

I don't know how the hell I'm going to be. I don't know how the people survived. I don't know how the people survived the worst forms of oppression. When they're survival physically and emotionally and mentally can only be regarded as a miracle, you might tend to be a little bit more open to the unexplainable in faith.

When your people have experienced centuries of colonization, when they are among what theologian John John said, and I believe that I have been having. That when you don't know how your people survive the worst forms of oppression, when their survival physically and emotionally and mentally can only be regarded as a miracle, you might tend to be a little bit more open to the unexplainable in faith.

When your people have experienced centuries of colonization, when they are among what theologian John Sabrina called the crucified peoples of the world, you might be a little bit more willing to accept resurrection without asking a lot of questions.

[4 : 27] When the hound dogs have been on your trail and somehow a way of escape has appeared, when your relationship to science has been tainted by unethical medical experiments and pseudoscience designed to tell you that you are inferior, when your spirituality has been one of the only protective forces against assimilation and cultural erasure, you tend to be a little bit more open to what cannot be rationalized.

Now for some of us in here, some of us who are people of color, those things have meant that our deconstruction and reconstruction in terms of faith has maybe looked a little bit different, maybe in some ways that we have struggled to put into words.

And maybe for others of us, there's been a temptation to look down on those ways of being and those ways of holding faith.

This openness to help from the outside and the appearance of a way out of no way. And I will say that I am a little bit ashamed that it's only been in the past few years that I've been able to name what an immense gift that this way of holding faith really, really is.

The writer and revolutionary thinker and somebody you've heard me name a million times and will hear me name a million more, Audrey Lord. She once wrote, the white fathers told us, I think, therefore I am.

[6 : 20] The black mother within each of us, the poet, whispers in our dreams, I feel, therefore I can be free.

For me, for me, remembering that my people's survival in this country is nothing short of a miracle has been really the major factor in grounding me in a relationship of aliveness with God.

They survived because of, absolutely because of their ingenuity. No questions asked. They were incredibly creative thinkers and they had to be just as we have to be when we think about how to escape systems of domination.

But in my gut, I also know that they survived because help came from the outside, beyond categories of logic. They stood, by and large, in a posture of openness because they had no choice. Yet that posture of openness is a legacy that I want to embrace every single day, even though I do have a choice.

[7 : 42] I think that it's the posture that leads to wholeness. I suspect it's the posture that leads to wholeness. I don't just think.

We don't just think. We feel. And in that, there is this riotous kind of joy that is at the center of the world, that holds the world together.

And part of why I am passionate about this church is that we think and feel. We're committed to engaging our questions and to learning faithfully and to expressing doubt.

And to allowing our faith to evolve when it needs to. But we also tend to our hearts. We tend to our hearts by accepting the romance of the God of love and the romance of the world around us.

And you might be surprised that I think this, but I think there aren't enough churches like this, y'all. I think there aren't enough churches like this who are non-denominational and prioritize modern worship and hold to progressive theology.

[8 : 53] Who are about curiosity and learning. Who use the language of wonder beyond skepticism and gratitude beyond control.

And all of that is really the language. It's the language of dreams. It's the language of dreamers. It's the language of miracle and of grace and of utter and sheer gift.

Now, I'm going to go really practical for a second. And say that the goal of this pastoral staff, Anthony and I, is to add a Sunday morning service in the fall.

That is our hope and dream. We want to extend our reach and not to grow big or be successful or seem successful or something. But it's because we know there aren't enough churches where people can experience this kind of faith.

And because of that conviction, we're going to kick off today our fundraising campaign for the week. I told y'all I was going to get practical, okay? So that got practical quick. So we're kicking off our Reimagine Fundraising Campaign.

[10 : 10] Yes, yes, yes. So our goal is to raise \$15,000 between this Sunday and next Sunday.

We've invited folks in this community to use their influence on social media networks to really let people know what this church is up to and to invite their networks into the process of funding.

Over 40 people have committed to this, which I'm super excited about that. And yeah, I'm asking today that y'all pray for us as we move through this next week.

I'm asking that if you want to help us kickstart the campaign, that you give \$50 or \$5 or whatever. And I'm also asking that if you want to fundraise, you can do that.

There are these little, I think the QR code is up in there. You can scan that and see how to do it. Thank you. But the final thing I want to say before Anthony comes up, and the thing I really, really want you to remember, if you don't remember anything else I've said, is that the kind of faith framework that has allowed me to embrace good theology and a faith that is grounded in beauty and joy and delight and mysticism is something that I have learned from marginalized people, that I have learned from queer people and black people and disabled people and people really that have been colonized the world over.

[11 : 45] I learned it, and I'm learning it from people who have been historically under-resourced and without power.

And here at the table, we talk about being justice-oriented. We talk about being anti-racist. We talk about being feminist.

And we have some work to do in defining for us exactly what all of those words mean and discerning what they mean for us here and now in the city.

But what that language attempts to do is to commit to talking about power, dynamics of power, relationships of power.

And for me, I've been in church all my life. And prior to Resurrection City and the table, I had never been in a community that would talk about power.

[12 : 44] Who holds it? How it needs to shift? Who's centered? Who's not? So along with our ability to talk about faith in these ways that are about head and heart, I think this ability to talk about power, to organize power differently, is a gift and a gift to the city.

And it makes a lot of sense because we follow this God who emptied themselves, taking on the form of a slave, right? Philippians too.

This God who gave up power for something much better. And that much better was about connection and relationship. It was about the revelation of love across boundaries.

That's good news. And that's the good news that undergirds this community. Come on up, Anthony. Anthony's going to share a little bit too, and then we're going to talk for just a couple minutes.

So I'm going to start with a personal brag. I get these weekly emails from Grammarly that says, you are more productive than 99% of Grammarly users.

[14 : 09] And, you know, I look at my email and I say, oh, Grammarly, I bet you say that to all your girlfriends. But I also know that, like, I'm, like, a highly productive person, and, like, I've got my to-do list and my charts, and, like, I manuscript my sermons and all of that.

And so I start with that brag to say that tonight I did not come up, I don't have a manuscript, I don't have notes. Sometimes I come up here with mostly just vibes. And I know the scriptures.

I can quote the scriptures. Man does not live on vibes alone. But I also wanted, like, there's this thing going on in my own spiritual life of just, like, what if, I told to another this earlier, what if, like, the Spirit actually were here, and the Spirit actually were moving, and the Spirit actually, she was in charge and doing stuff, and can I go with that flow?

So here I am. So Taneta had asked us a question earlier, like, the two of us earlier this week as we were thinking about this Sunday, which was, like, what about your own testimony, your own story with God makes the table church so important to you?

And sometimes I will admit that I can play, like, oppression Olympics with myself. One time we were doing something similar to what we're doing right now and talked about the fact that I'm a straight, cis, white male, and, like, somebody in good humor booed at me.

[15 : 43] And, like, there's a sense of, like, I don't know if I deserve the table. I'm not sure, like, why is it so important to me? And also, I did grow up in poverty, and I did go through the foster system, and I did have a congenital, I do have a congenital heart defect.

And there are all these things in my life that developed this deep sense of, like, empathy and compassion for those who have been left out in some way. And I, again, we're not playing oppression Olympics, but I do know something about what it is to be left out.

And the reason that a church like the table is so important to me is that you get this experience where you have everybody with all their different stories, and the fact of the matter is we all know something about what it is to be left out.

And I am enamored with a God who invites us in, who tears down the walls of left outness.

And one of these values that we've been talking about is, you know, it's not so much our goal is to be, like, a multiracial or multiethnic church.

[17 : 02] I think that's an admirable goal for churches that want that. But, like, the sociological definition is, like, 80%. It could be an 80% white church, 20% something else, and that's multiracial.

And I feel like it's a better goal, or at least the goal that we want to pursue, is to center the margins. So if whoever has been left out, pushed out, whoever has had, like, systems and structures set up against them so that they can't belong, to, like, well, let's just, let's focus on them.

Let's not only invite them in, but, like, have them create the space. And then the further conversation that Tanetta and I have is, like, how do we get rid of the systems that make there be margins in the first place?

How do we get rid of the systems that make sure that all of the things, LGBTQ people and people of certain races and abilities and people who grew up poor and people who are poor now and people who don't have, like, the quote-unquote American dream sort of family?

Like, how do we make sure that all the things that set that up, like, they don't get in the way of people having an experience with God? The other reason I love the table is that, like, you can have this wide spectrum of the way that people experience God.

[18 : 31] Really wide spectrum. Really wide spectrum, okay? Like, people who, they are praying the rosary, people who are doing tarot, people who are, me, okay, me, one of the deepest experiences I had with God was walking in the mountains of the Shenandoah with my AirPods in listening to two Greek professors talk about the Greek of Mark chapter 1.

And I felt the presence of God that day, okay? I'm nerding out on Greek, and I know that God is with me. And, and, like, you get a group of people together, and we start singing, and we start lifting our hands, we start raising our voices, we give a benediction, and then no one leaves because they want to keep going.

I felt the presence of God. And so the reason that places like the table are so important to me is that it's this wide variance of, like, just all these ways of experiencing God, and you are welcome.

You're allowed to be here. So one of the things that I've said since I got here in 2020 is, like, I want there to be more table churches. No, I don't want a franchise. I don't want to be, like, drive-through McDonald's church.

Like, I don't, I don't want my, I don't want my name or my face on a billboard or a book cover.

Please do not do that. But what I want are more spaces where someone can show up and they know they are loved.

[19 : 56] They know that God, as we prayed earlier, has affection for them, not only loves them, but likes them. When I think about the idea of dismantling marginal, like, marginality, essentially, like, so that there are, like, people are centered and de-centered in healthy ways so that there is no permanent margin anymore.

I think, and you said this in one of our meetings, that that is the process to commit to that does get you to a community that is more representative of, I think, the city around us.

So it is, I think that the idea, the goal of being... I feel really far away from you. What? So close.

No, you're so close. The idea of being, like, I get really excited about having all kinds of people reading the Bible together and sharing wisdom and being transformed by that experience.

But I do think committing to the larger goal of, you know, actually, like, you know, I always get a little nervous when I talk from my own perspective because I know it is not the dominant perspective in the room, and yet that is an act of centering that I think, I hope that we lean into more and more.

[21 : 36] You know, when I started Resurrection City, I would say that one of the things that motivated me was that I struggled with seeing so many churches that really were just imitating the domination, the structures of domination, the systems of domination of the culture around us, right?

Like, theology of God was basically coercive versus consensual. I mean, essentially, the way I often think about it in my own prayer time is, like, God is a slaver. Like, that kind of, like, theology that God controls and takes over.

And, you know, I saw communities that, you know, have been part of so often communities that, you know, the ways the leaders, you know, led were deeply hierarchical. They weren't about team or mutuality or the power of the folks, you know, in the room, the power of the folks showing up, and that has been a deeply frustrating, I think, thing for me.

And I've been excited to see that this is a community where we can talk about, like, what does it look like? Even for me, honestly, as a pastor, I think a lot about what's expected of pastors and how unhealthy that is.

See, this is the part of that. See, this is when we start riffing. I just don't say it, right? Yeah, yeah, yeah. That I, like, often think about, like, I don't, that idea that people have of the executive, I don't fit it well, but, like, that's not actually what we need more of, right?

[23 : 06] So I think a lot about those kinds of things. I think, like, the way, so we made this announcement back in February, like, we're moving towards co-pastoring, right?

And the reality is, like, that was a conversation that you and I had before you were even properly interviewed, and then we kept having that conversation, we kept having that conversation, and the elders had a decision towards, like, okay, this is what we're going to move towards.

And I feel like it's a perfect representation of, like, the table and DC and the way that we work, and that, like, we basically serve as co-pastors.

We make decisions together. We plan things together, all of that. And the sort of, like, DC part of it is, like, and can we please have a policy handbook on how this is going to work?

And can it be reviewed? And, like, that's good. You need that. Like, I've been in churches. I've been in organizations where, like, you don't have a handbook, and you don't have a policy, and things fall apart real fast. So I'm not dissing that.

[24 : 10] But I feel like it's that interesting interplay between, like, we riff, we go with the flow, we go on vibes, but you can't live on vibes alone, and you need the structure and the policy and all of that.

And I feel like that's the sort of interesting place where the table is constantly, of God's spirit is moving in people's lives, and people start acting and moving in certain ways, and then, like, how do we catch up to that and make sure that it's sustainable?

We didn't talk about fundraising for years. Now we've got to talk about fundraising. Like, it's all of that stuff. Yeah, I, um, so I love jazz. I made a joke last week about Cardi B.

I don't know any Cardi B songs. Okay? I like jazz, all right? I like that old school. Give me a little Miles, you know, a little John Coltrane. But I think a lot about when you talk about this flow of, you know, kind of a jazz quartet versus a symphony orchestra.

And what does it mean to lean into improvisation and to the voices of everybody in the room mingling and being centered and playing off of each other in terms of gifting and grace and need versus one person or two people at the front kind of directing and orchestrating and making everything look perfect.

[25 : 30] And jazz is messy. Half the time, I don't even understand jazz. Y'all know, you know, I don't know about this, but I think it's pretty cool. And so I think that is also part of the leadership style, the community style that we are going with.

It's much more an improv, jazz-influenced style than that symphony orchestra. And I'll just say, like, jazz is great American music.

And so I am hoping that this style of church, and I don't mean this in, like, a franchise way, but that this style of church can influence more communities.

One thing I talk about a lot is that ideas matter. And it matters, you know, the sustainability of churches like this one so that we can put forward different kinds of ideas.

Yeah, yeah. Two more things I think I want to say, and then we've got to keep going. One, a theme that we keep sensing in this congregation, this community, is the idea of re-enchantment.

[26 : 37] If you missed our Christmas Eve service tonight, I gave this amazing talk on re-enchantment. And it can be... I was going to say easy. That's not quite the right word.

We are prone towards cynicism because the world that we live in is so prone to hurt us and traumatize us. And I feel like I know within my own life the reaction would be to make God like this platonic ideal that I don't actually ever have to interact with.

And I know that there are folks in this room that, like, you're hearing God's voice. You've got dreams. You've got visions. Like, you've got the gift of the prophetic. You're speaking in tongues.

You're getting inklings from God's spirit that are moving you towards justice and liberation.

And we've got to be okay talking about those things because our faith is more than just like, oh, we happen to be the ones to get the multiple choice correct.

And that, therefore, makes us, like, more trustworthy. It's that jazz piece of, like, jazz is about listening to each other and listening to the leader. And in this case, the leader is the spirit of God

active and moving in this place.

[27 : 51] And then the second piece I wanted to say, too, riffing on the jazz thing, is, like, when you were talking about One Big Sunday, when it's going to look like, like, there was a very briefly held but quickly dismissed notion of, like, let's present a five-year plan.

We don't have a five-year plan. We don't have a five-year plan. Now, I'd like us, we both want to be, like, more strategic and have, like, a sense of vision of where we're going.

And we want to offer that to you. And so our hope is that we can do some of that. We might have a five-year plan when you're talking next year, maybe. But because the world is as it is, because you've got the leaders that you've got, and not just us, but, like, the variety of us, it's a lot more of, like, how do we listen to what the spirit is up to?

It's seen in the book of Acts. It seems right to God and to us. How do we... Yeah, do you want to finish my thought?

Yeah, I think one thing that's coming up for me, and I'm going to risk something here on camera, which is to talk about Hebrew.

[29 : 00] There is a word, and you will help me if I pronounce this wrong, but it is haneni, a Hebrew word that you see a couple different times in the Bible, the Old Testament.

And it basically means, like Abraham says it, it basically means, here I am. Like, God is calling, like, here, and just imagine a person, like, throwing their arms open and saying, here I am.

I don't know exactly what you're going to say. I don't know the next move, but here I am. I am present. I am present. And I think that's where we are sensing this community is and is moving toward, just being open and deeply present.

This posture of openness to what God is up to. And I do. I feel like there are seeds from this 10-year experience of this community, beautiful seeds, beautiful seeds that have gone into the ground, that have gone deeply into the ground.

And that, yeah, that we are now, you know, more and more seeing come to fruition this vision. And our goal is to say, here we are to that vision.

[30 : 14] Yeah.