



Westminster Presbyterian Church

The Rev. Laurie Brubaker Davis
May 14, 2017 Sermon

Get Up and Make Your Bed!

John 14:18-24 and Acts 9:32-43

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 far left side, which cannot be seen from the door into the closet, instead of a wall, there is a narrow little door that leads into another room! We call it, “The Secret Room.” When we purchased our home, we were told that the original owner had that room built as a place she could run and hide in case a burglar should break in.

Of course we were all intrigued with this room and its intended purpose. But that was over 20 years ago, and since then it has evolved (or I should say “devolved”) from a handy, dry upstairs attic 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 into it, we’ve found it much easier to just throw whatever, through the door, knowing it will have a soft landing. Yes: it is a mess. We’ve really only cleaned it up twice in 20 years and the last time was about 13 years ago. So of course, we never talk about this room or show 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’ story, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; but also that a house with adults who appear to be in charge....could have such a room.

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 one of your pastor’s houses. Are we not, “do everything decently and in order” Presbyterians? Or 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 in front of 400 people.

Whatever state of order or chaos we left our homes in this morning; whether you have a “Secret Room” or not, our scripture lessons in John’s Gospel and in the Book of Acts, tell tales of people whose lives have been upended, if not already ended: We heard in John, a piece of Jesus’ Farewell discourse to the disciples as they were facing Jesus’ imminent death on the cross. 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 who had been bedridden and paralyzed for eight years; then being summoned by two men to hurry onto Joppa where Tabitha’s circle of friends, hands still moist and fragrant from washing and anointing the body of their dear disciple, seamstress, and friend. Yes, we see in these stories scared people, sad people, confused people. Our scriptures shine a light on them right when their lives are a hot mess.

And yet, Jesus is there with them. In the mess. Yes, this is a messy sermon about our secret rooms, clutter, cobwebs, and unmade beds: right here on Mother’s Day. 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. No matter what you think or 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; or if you have friends or family mucking through the valley of hot mess, Jesus is right there with them too. Perhaps this morning you are more worried about the hot mess that our climate, our country, or our world is in. Yes: Jesus is here in 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 anytime your child says, "why do I have to make my bed, I'm just going to mess it up tonight anyway," to say, "because it's in the Bible: Acts 9:34!" No, that's not it.

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, coupled with the mundane, routine, quotidian, homemaking 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 very domestic push and pull of our every day lives. In fact, this is where resurrection begins. The new life in Christ, a different life, a 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 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 5th Sunday of Easter, also known as Eastertide, we are five 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: But this Spring Cleaning is a collaborative effort. 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 us without God, or God without us. 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."¹

Now about 2000 years later, just how is that collaborative Cosmic Spring Cleaning going? 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. As she wrote in her book, *The Great Emergence*, "The Right Reverend Mark Dyer...

famously observes from time to time that the only way to understand what is currently happening to us as twenty-first century Christians in North America is first to understand that about every five hundred years the Church feels compelled to hold a giant rummage sale... We are living in and through one of those five-hundred-year sales.”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. Repair and restoration returns 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: "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 and God as homemakers: there with us scraping carrots, scouring pans, purging dead food from the refrigerator; pairing socks, descumming the bathroom. Emmanuel, God With Us, Christ abiding with us where we live.

Let's be honest. Like it or not, a big part of homemaking is taken up with washing and cleaning: the rooms in our houses, the food we eat, the dishes, pots and pans we cook with—and ourselves—our bodies, daily—our hands several times a day. From the day they are born, we wash our children, we give them baths. And we do so 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 once and for all by the same Spirit that baptized our Lord in the River Jordan. 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, up and down, tears and laughter: 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 most recent book, *Hallelujah Anyway*, writes 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 baptized" ⁱⁱⁱ

What is God calling you to get up and do today? Who do you know who is dying to be included? 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? 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.