

My mom was in her mid-twenties when she gave my Grandpa that crazy Father's Day gift. Just a few months earlier she had left her home in Rockford, Illinois to take a job in Duluth as a parish worker at Bethany Lutheran Church. As Father's Day approached she tried to find a gift that would meet three requirements. First, it had to be novel – that meant handkerchiefs and ties were out. Second, it had to be something she could mail, because she wouldn't have vacation until August. Third, it had to be inexpensive, for church workers didn't make much money back in those days.

She shopped around for several days and finally discovered what she thought was a perfect gift – candy that looked like Lake Superior agates. This candy looked so much like real agates that she decided to take the label off the bag and see if her dad would be able to figure out what they were.

In the weeks following Father's Day, Grandpa never acknowledged receiving the gift. The two of them had a couple of phone conversations, but he never mentioned that he had received the candy.

When my mom returned home for her vacation in August, she finally asked him if he had received the gift. "Oh, yes," he said. "They are very nice rocks. From the shore of Lake Superior, I take it." By his tone of voice, he obviously thought his daughter had rocks in her head to be giving rocks as a gift.

"Yes, they're agates," said my mom. "What did you do with them?"

"Oh, I put them over there in a drawer. I didn't really know what else to do with them."

"I'll go get them," she said, and she walked over to the desk, took out the bag of rocks, brought them into the living room and, without saying a word, popped one into her mouth and started chewing on it.

Grandpa's jaw dropped and his eyes nearly popped out of their sockets. "What are you doing eating rocks?" he demanded. After everything was explained, they both had a good laugh and Grandpa remarked, "To think I've had this gift all this time and I didn't know what to do with it!"

This morning we have gathered to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Churches the world over are experiencing their best attendance of the year because people realize that the resurrection is the foundation stone of the Christian faith. Without the resurrection, there would be no Christian religion.

For all its importance, we really don't talk about the resurrection much other than on Easter. Why is that? Maybe it's because the resurrection for us is kind of like my grandpa's rock candy. We know it's meant to be special, but we don't really know what to do with it, and so we sort of put it in a drawer or on a shelf, bring it out once a year on Easter to dust it off and admire it, and then we put it away again and live our lives as if it never happened.

Too often Christians think that the significance of the resurrection pertains only going to heaven when we die. They have the idea that the resurrection is something to talk about at funerals to give us hope in the face of death, but has little to do with our everyday situations.

Such an outlook robs the resurrection of its power and significance. The resurrection does have something to say to us on days other than Easter. One of my favorite Easter anthems begins "Every morning is Easter morning from now on." That's exactly the idea I want us to walk out of this service with this morning.

Every morning is Easter morning – so what should we be doing with the resurrection tomorrow, or next week, or next month? What difference does it make, or should it make, to say that Christians are "resurrection people"?

The key to understanding the significance of Jesus' resurrection can be found in the short reading from Colossians. There Paul reminds us that for Christians, the resurrection can never merely be a historical event, for we are already raised with Christ. It's present tense, not future tense. And we are daily called to set our minds and actions to seeing to it that God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

These demands are laid upon us in baptism. It is in the waters of baptism that we experience the reality of the resurrection. In his letter to the Romans Paul says, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

What does it mean to say that we die and are brought back to life in baptism? Perhaps we can answer that question by seeing how the rite of baptism is administered in a Latin American congregation.

The service begins like any other worship service, but after the sermon, after hearing about God's gracious acts for his people, the congregation begins singing a mournful funeral hymn as a solemn procession moves down the aisle. A father carries a child's wooden coffin which he has made. A mother carries a bucket of water from the family well. And the pastor carries their sleeping infant wrapped in a blanket.

When they reach the front of the church, the father places the coffin on the altar, the mother pours the water into the coffin, and the pastor covers the wakening baby's skin with embalming oil. The singing softens to a whisper as the pastor slowly lowers the infant into the coffin and immerses the child's head in the water. Then he exclaims, "I kill you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The congregation shouts, "Amen!" and the pastor then quickly thrusts the child into the air for all to see and declares, "And I resurrect you that you might love and serve the Lord." At that point, the congregation breaks into a joyous Easter hymn, proclaiming the victory of the resurrection. The rite of baptism ends with the pastor making the sign of the cross on the child's forehead and saying, "I brand you with the sign of Christ so that you and the world will always know who you are and to whom you belong."

As this highly dramatized rite of baptism clearly shows, resurrection is not something we look forward to in the future, something that we store on a shelf and celebrate once a year. Resurrection is something that has already happened for baptized Christians and continues to happen each and every day of their lives.

What do we do with the resurrection? We remember it every morning. Our resurrection in baptism is our Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that we are set from the powers of sin and death, that they no longer have control of our lives.

At the same time, our resurrection in baptism is our call to service. We are marked with the sign of the cross, branded with the sign of God's love, and reminded when God wants something done in the world, God does it through God's resurrected people. When God feeds the hungry, God does it through us. When God demands justice, God does it through us. When God works for peace, God does it through us.

We, the resurrection people, are God's hands, feet, and ears by which God ministers to a hurting, confused world. It's a big task! Sometimes we're hurting and confused ourselves. But, you see, it's not just us doing these things. On our own, we couldn't possibly do all these things. But God infuses life and love in us and makes us new people -- resurrected people infused with God's love.

What do we do with the resurrection? We do what we say at the conclusion of every service: first, we go in peace, knowing that we are in the care of a loving God and that nothing, not even death, can separate us from God's love. And secondly, we serve the Lord, doing God's work in the world, for it is Jesus' resurrection that has made everything possible.