

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

- Christ is risen, the power of death has been broken and our sins will not keep us from the love of God forever.
- Spring has sprung, the snow fence is down, and the flowers are beginning to bloom.
- The Covid vaccine is rolling out, we are open, and our church ministries are starting to return to their former levels.

Granted we are not open as much as we would like since there is still no congregational singing and I miss the triumphal hymns associated with Easter like: Welcome happy morning!, He is risen!, Christ is alive! and so many others ...although we are very grateful to Michael for his musical contributions to our liturgy. I also miss all of you on Zoom but am grateful that the gift of technology gives us a way to be together.

Welcome happy morning indeed. Our celebration of Easter, the proclamation of our faith in the resurrection of our Lord, and the joy of the Eucharist are all a foretaste of what is to come. Those of you who have been to enough Episcopal funerals will recognize our reading from Isaiah. It reminds people that death is not the end and that we look forward to a new life with God, a new life like a heavenly banquet a sumptuous feast after our tears and shame will be wiped away. *“It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; lets us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” As Christians we believe this refers to the coming of Christ.*

Nevertheless, fully embracing the concept of resurrection, that Jesus died, was publicly executed, buried in a tomb closed by a heavy rock, and was resurrected and rose from the dead, and then talked and walked with his disciples, well all that presents some challenges of its own. No, I am not about to how to prove that Christ arose from a scientific perspective, this is what we accept as a matter of faith – it is why our faith matters. But for those who first encountered the risen Lord, or at least the evidence that he had risen, well that was a bit challenging as we hear in our gospel from Mark.

It has been said that the women who followed Jesus were more faithful than the men, more faithful than Peter who denied him three times and more faithful than those who did not stay with him on the cross. And yet Mark’s gospel gives us pause. Three of those faithful women prepared spices so that they could anoint Jesus’ body. The first question we could ask is, if they were such faithful followers, why did they not believe his words? Why did they think it necessary to go to the tomb to anoint him since he wasn’t supposed to be there for very long?

They worry about the rock covering the tomb and how thy might roll it away and are surprised to find that the stone had been moved. The tomb was open. Not only was the tomb open but there is a strange young man dressed in white sitting there and no sign of Jesus’ body. The young man tells them that Jesus has been raised and to tell the disciples that he will meet them in Galilee.

These women, who had been faithful unto death were not able to grasp what had occurred, they could not comprehend that Jesus had been raised. The reality of the resurrection was too much to absorb. The women fled from the tomb in terror and said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.

*Those last two sentences were not part of the ending of the gospel and were added later to conform with the accounts of Matthew and Luke and John. Moreover, somebody must have spilled the beans or Jesus would have been wandering around Galilee looking for his disciples (well, probably not) but the word was spread.*

If we are honest with ourselves, we cannot blame the women for their initial reaction. The resurrection was the ultimate sign of the truth of Jesus words, and they were not ready to go from the intense grief at his death to the good news of his being raised. Something that awesome, something that resonates with an encounter with the divine usually leaves those present in awe-inspired fear. Remember Gabriel's words to Mary, or the words that the angel of the Lord spoke to the shepherds as they watched by night. Fear of the Lord is right and proper.

Now think for yourselves a time in which you received unexpected, good news? It probably wasn't quite as earth-shattering as the news that Jesus had been raised but maybe it left you feeling like you had been whacked over the head. I remember receiving unbelievable good news and my reaction was so powerful that I gave myself a massive headache and started crying.

So perhaps we can cut the women some slack. After all Jesus forgave the men who had deserted him why would he not forgive the women who were too afraid of the good news to spread the word?

It is challenging to grasp the significance of Jesus' resurrection, the astonishing culmination of the incarnation, the word made flesh, that the Son of God came and lived among us. The Son of God lived among us as a perfect human being, so faithful, so obedient to his Father, that his words and actions shook the Jewish religious authorities and the Roman Empire to its core. Jesus came preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins and the Kingdom of God, a new way to live life in relation to God. By his death he revealed how he joins with us in our suffering, in the challenges and pain of our human condition. But his rising again changes everything. We have new life in him, the knowledge of his presence with us through the Holy Spirit, and the hope of life to come. Hope. More than anything, the resurrection gives us hope. The first anthem in our service of Christian burial quotes the gospel of John (11:25):

*I am Resurrection and I am Life, says the Lord. Whoever has faith in me shall have life, even though he die. And everyone who has life, and has committed himself to me in faith, shall not die for ever.*

Alleluia, Christ is risen!