

LIVING THE RESURRECTION

“Alleluia! Christ is risen. *The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.* Isn’t it great to have the Alleluias back! I think sometimes the loudest Alleluias of the whole year are the ones we don’t say during Lent. But we are an Easter people, and “Alleluia!” is our song! Alleluia!

Alleluia for the women! In all four gospels it’s Mary Magdalene who came to the tomb early in the morning and saw that the stone had been rolled away. It was the women who ran and told the disciples and the others. The men had fled for their lives – thank God for the women!

We read that the women and the disciples were amazed. This was not what they were expecting. They thought Jesus was dead. How about us? What do we make of this Easter story of resurrection, 2000 years later? Is it so familiar to us that we lose any sense of how amazing it must have been to Jesus’ followers? And more importantly, can we today live Christ’s resurrection in our lives? The resurrection of Christ is not just a wonderful past event, like the discovery of gold in California, or the 49ers’ four Super Bowls. Christ promises to come to us and be with us, today and always.

Without Easter would we ever even have heard about Jesus? Would he have been just one of the thousands of Jews who were crucified by the Romans during those bloody years they occupied Palestine? Perhaps he would have been remembered as a prophet – a wise idealist. But – something miraculous happened that carved all of history into BC and AD. After Easter the early Christian community came together to remember and give meaning to Jesus’ death, and to celebrate his presence with them, now. With Easter we are here today 2000 years later, as a Christian community.

But -- what do Christians mean when we talk about the resurrection? If it’s so central to Christianity, what is it? What exactly is resurrection?

I’d like us to think about two very different ways of looking at the resurrection of Jesus.

One way is a theological, rational way, the way that appeals to those of us who operate largely out of the left brain, the thinking, logical side.

If you're a person who likes to think theologically, a left brain, thinking kind of person, (and I know there are some of you here), let me put the resurrection this way – in terms of creation. In his book *Christian Hope*, theologian John Macquarrie explores the idea.

Creation is a continuing process, right? It wasn't just a six-day thing with God. The process of creation and evolution is still going on.

For eons and eons there was only the non-living – rocks and air and water. Then living things emerged – plants and trees and all kinds of vegetation. After more eons, animals emerged. And then from the living animals emerged human beings. Us.

At each emerging stage of creation you couldn't have foreseen what was coming next, could you.

So here's the crucial point. Why should we assume that we've come to the last of such emergences? Why would we assume that God is finished with creation?

Perhaps expressions like “the resurrection of the dead” and “the kingdom of heaven” can be understood as pictorial or imaginative ways of pointing forward to the next stage of creation. Perhaps the resurrected body of Christ is a hint, a preview, of what that next stage might look like. But just as in the earlier emergences, the next step remains largely hidden as long as we are still on this side of it.

Look at what we know about the risen body of Christ. Christ miraculously appears to the disciples inside a closed room – twice. He appears to two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus, walks along with them, talks with them, accepts their invitation to stay with them, but they don't even recognize him until he breaks bread and gives it to them. Then poof! He vanishes from their sight.

Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus' closest friends, sees him in the garden but somehow thinks he's the gardener, until he says her name – “Mary.”

There's obviously something very different about this risen body of Christ. It's not a resuscitated corpse, like that of Lazarus or the others Jesus raised from the dead, who in due course died again. There's something different about this body, something unrecognizable, until he does or says something familiar to them. Christ's risen body is no

longer subject to our human limitations of time and space. Could it be that the risen body of Christ is a hint of what the next stage of our existence might look like, a preview of what God has in store for all of us?

That's one way, a rational, theological, left-brain way of looking at the resurrection of Jesus. If it helps you comprehend the resurrection, terrific. It helped me, a lot.

If that's too much of a 'head trip' for this hour of the morning, don't worry about it. Because there's also another way.

As I've gotten older and maybe mellower I've drifted toward the more intuitive, right-brain way of understanding the resurrection. I now believe Easter is really in the heart, not in the head. Like the birth of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus is an event that's beyond our ability to understand. It just is. We don't need to try either to understand it or explain it.

We may think we're pretty sophisticated educated people in 2017; we more often than not turn to Google for answers to our questions. But when life is at its most difficult, through illness or death or loss of a job or some other tragedy, we Christians turn to the risen Christ, the power of God among us today. We don't study the resurrection, we live the resurrection.

Easter is music and poetry and stories – flowers and pageantry, tears and laughter and love. Families together for Easter brunch. Easter is a new life, a life free of booze or drugs or obsession with wealth and status. Easter is forgiveness -- forgiveness given and, what is sometimes more difficult, forgiveness received. Easter is a relationship restored, a body healed.

Easter is dying to the old 'me-first' way of living, and being reborn into a new way of living, a Christ-centered way of compassion and love. As St. Paul tells us, "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation."

Easter is the contrast between this church on Good Friday, stripped stark and bare with black veils over the crosses -- and the glory of this beautiful church this morning.

Easter is understanding that God chose Mary Magdalene, a woman on the fringes of society, to tell the story of God's victory over the forces of evil.

Easter is in the eyes of the children at the communion rail.

Easter is God's reversal of Good Friday, God's decisive "Yes" to Jesus against the religious and political authorities' verdict of death.

Jesus' passion in life was the kingdom of God -- what life would be like in a just world where everyone has enough and the political systems are fair. Jesus' passion for the kingdom of God got him executed. But God has said "Yes" to Jesus. And Jesus, the risen Jesus who lives in you and in me, is counting on us to help bring about that kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven.

We still struggle, against the terrible injustice of the world, where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. We struggle against war and pain and disease, against environmental degradation, against the inner forces of anxiety and depression that threaten to take us back into that old world of sin and death. In this life, we do see through a glass darkly. But we know there's another world, God's kingdom, a world where there is no pain or sickness or separation but life eternal with God. That's the world we get a hint of in the risen body of Christ. Easter calls us to be a new creation, to live resurrection.

Alleluia. Christ is risen. *The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.*