

Easter

It's been a long time since we have listened to Matthew's memory of Easter morning.

Of all the resurrection accounts, Matthew's is the one that is actually quite hilarious.

After all, we have the Roman version of the Navy SEALs assigned to guard the well-sealed tomb of Jesus.

This show of human force and might and bravado is taken completely out of the picture; as these brave men faint dead away with fear at the sight of a messenger from heaven.

As that cheeky messenger rolls away the stone from the tomb, and plops herself down on it, saying, with a big smile on her face to these three faithful yet terrified women, the three most common words in all of scripture: "Don't be afraid!"

The stone is rolled away not to let Jesus out — but to let the women in.

Jesus, it seems, is long gone.

He's gone ahead of them — to Galilee.

Back to the place where it all began.

Back to the place where it will begin once again.

And these brave and frightened women are to follow him there.

And let's not forget that the first witnesses to his resurrection **are women!**

Women who, for Jesus, are never second class citizens, but who are in fact the first apostles, because they are the first to witness his new, risen life!

And these women listen!

And they head off to the place they are told to go.

But then, as Jesus so often does even today, while we are in the midst of following him, while we trudge along assuming it will be a long time before we catch up with him, suddenly, and without warning, there he is – right before our eyes.

Physical enough so that his feet can be embraced.

Spirit enough so that he can walk through walls and disappear in the blink of an eye.

He tells the women, just as he tells us, "Don't be afraid!"

And that is why we are here today.

We are here today because in the resurrection, in the person of Jesus, heaven and earth are united.

These seeming opposites, in Jesus, are now one.

Which has enormous implications for us.

Just as Jesus now occupies a transfigured body, one that has attributes of the flesh of creation, and attributes of the spirit of God, just so shall we all become.

This is the hope, this is the promise, of our faith.

And there is this.

Last week at Palm Sunday we spoke at some length of God not only being forgiving but also of God being just.

We spoke at some length of God, not only forgiving the unforgivable, but making right the most unjustified, the most hideous wrongs committed by humanity.

And I'm sure that many of you sitting in these pews were thinking last week, what's God waiting for?!

Because that sure as heck doesn't seem to be happening!

And it's true.

The resurrection has not yet ushered in the totality of God's kingdom.

But it has most definitely ushered in the first seed of that kingdom.

And for reasons known only to God, we are given this time, we are given these centuries, we are given this life, to plant more of those seeds so that this broken creation might slowly come to more and more resemble the kingdom of God.

Why are we here?

Why the struggles and questions and heartache and terrors?

Perhaps there are important lessons that we each of us have to learn during this life.

Lessons that will be put to use in the next life.

Lessons that we will need to learn to meet the challenges and adventures and wonders of the world that is to come.

That while we are not yet co-creators with God, one day perhaps we shall become exactly that.

Not only on this planet, but throughout all of creation.

And while we cannot fathom the wonders that await us, we need to be prepared for them.

And perhaps that's the purpose of this life.

That each of us has something to do that helps bring into being the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

Something no one else can do.

And while we may never know what that is — rest assured — you are irreplaceable in God's greater purpose!

As Bishop Tom Wright puts it:

“Every act of love, gratitude, and kindness.

Every work of art or music inspired by the love of God and delight in the beauty of his creation.

Every minute spent teaching a severely handicapped child to read or to walk.

Every act of care and nurture, of comfort and support, for one's fellow human beings — and for that matter — one's fellow nonhuman creatures.

And of course, every prayer.

All Spirit-led teaching.

Every deed that spreads the gospel.

Builds up the church.

Embraces and embodies holiness rather than corruption.

That makes the name of Jesus honored in the world.

All of this will find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation that God will one day make.

Such is the logic of the mission of God.

God's re-creation of this wonderful world, which begins with the resurrection of Jesus — and continues mysteriously as God's people live in the risen Christ and in the power of his Spirit — means that what we do in Christ and by the Spirit in the present — is never wasted.

It will last all the way into God's new world.

In truth, it will be fulfilled there." N.T. Wright, paraphrased.

If we can bring ourselves to finally recapture the significance of this day, if we open ourselves to the vast power of love: of one another, of this planet, of ourselves as beloved children of God, we can then be part of the unfolding new creation that began that first Easter morning.

In these post-pandemic days, with gun violence spiraling out of control, with indictments of a former president rolling off the printing presses, and with a still fracturing body politic, we have a chance to reclaim our true character – and our true destiny.

We can create communities grounded in loving service by accepting one another as equally blessed children of the good Creator.

And if we do that, we can change the world!

So this Easter, take hold of your true self!

Recognize that the God who raises Jesus from the dead is the same God who will one day raise you too!

This is the stone that the builders reject, which becomes the cornerstone.

And what is the name of that rejected cornerstone?

Its name, is love.

Love raises Jesus today.

Love raises you too.

Embrace it.

Learn from it.

Grow with it.

And when the time comes, die in it.

For we shall all of us rise again -- to a new and glorious life!

And with this, with our true destiny in mind, in a few moments, we are going to baptize 14 human beings.

14 human beings who are saying yes to this spectacularly upside down, paradoxical, always challenging, yet wonderfully perplexing life as followers of Jesus.

14 human beings who agree that they will die to the expectations of this world, to the false promises of fame and fortune and power, and learn to live into the life of Christ.

14 human beings who have committed themselves to slowly yet surely learn how to live a life which lets go of control of people places and things.

A life which surrenders to this God who gives everything to have us.

So welcome to this Sunday of the resurrection!

May you feel stirring within yourself the call to follow this gentle, yet ferocious, Messiah from Galilee.

May the stones that cover your hopes and dreams be rolled away!

May the angels come and sit on those stones, delighting in the new openness now growing in your life.

And with that, let us baptize these people, and let us welcome them into the life of Christ Jesus!

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