**Easter Sunday**

**March 27, 2016**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,**

**The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,**

**And the power of God known in the spirit.**

**Amen.**

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

What a beautiful day! Easter celebrates new life and even here in St. Augustine seeing flowers and trees and plants come alive again after winter is one symbol of that new life. But today we celebrate more than flowers and budding trees. Today we celebrate the power of God to bring new life out of death, to give us joy instead of weeping, to empower our lives into wholeness after being broken. It is a joyous Easter Day!

This morning we heard Luke’s story of the empty tomb. The women rose early and took spices expecting to prepare the body of Jesus. But the tomb was empty except for two angels. “Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” they asked. The women reported this to the other disciples but their story was dismissed as foolishness. Only after Peter ran to the tomb and found it as the women had said did the disciples begin to experience the amazement of the event.

These few verses are just a snippet of the bigger story. Two thousand years after they were written they are, for us, Good News. But what about that first Easter. Remember, it was the week of the Passover Festival in Jerusalem. Jewish pilgrims from all over Israel had flocked to the holy city. The occupying Roman troops were on high alert for rabble rousers, and they had found one in Jesus. Along with two others he had been hung on a cross to die on Friday. His disciples and the others that followed along with him must have been devastated with grief, and at the same time living with the fear caused by the threat of a similar treatment from the Roman soldiers.

Jesus wasn’t just a companion, a friend, a family member. This was a person in whom those around him had seen love expressed in ways they had never known. This was a person who had such a sense of who he was as a child of God … and of God’s love for him … that those around him saw God alive in Jesus. He was always encouraging people to be more than who they thought they were … more than the labels that the world placed upon them. He empowered people to live into the full image of God in which they were made. The blind were made to see … the deaf could hear … the lame took up their mat and walked … the marginalized were included … those who were broken by sin were made whole.

And this was the Jesus who died on the cross. Not only was there the personal grief of the loss of a companion, a friend, a family member. But it was the loss of hope for what might have been. And I imagine that there was at least a deep questioning about the God of Jesus … their God … who let Jesus die the way that he did. If God really was all that Jesus had said that God was, then why did this God allow this to happen?

From Friday afternoon until Sunday morning the disciples and the rest of the band of follower of Jesus had to live with these feelings. Grief … fear … loss of hope … perhaps even the beginning of a questioning of their faith. And then the women went to the tomb … and found it empty.

Not only did they find the tomb empty, but two angels were there …”Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” In the confusion of all that had just happened, what could this possibly mean? Two thousand years later we have put lots of meaning to the Resurrection, but can you imagine the confusion of the women at the tomb on that first Easter morning? And then they report this to the disciples and are dismissed as spreading foolish thoughts. Only after Peter decided to check it out for himself did they even begin to experience the “amazement” of the event.

“Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” It did not take long for the disciples to understand that what Jesus had preached in his earthly life was true even in his death. The God of all creation has the power to bring new life out of death. The God who had the power to make even the barren become fruitful; who could rescue those in bondage and lead them to freedom; who could restore an exiled nation to its homeland; who could make the lame to walk, and the deaf to hear, and the blind to see; this God also had the power to give life to Jesus the Christ even after his death on the cross. The images of the scriptures that Jesus quoted in his earthly life now took on new meaning. Abraham and Sarah, Moses and the Exodus, the return to Jerusalem after the Babylonian Exile, the call for Jubilee and a restoration of God’s plan of salvation. They weren’t just stories of the past … they became as real as Jesus’ life had been when he was among them … and as real as his Resurrected life would become for the Church in generations to come.

Remember, this isn’t just a story about the past, about an event 2,000 years ago. If it means anything at all to faithful people today it means that we can live with the knowledge and hope that God has the power to bring new life when we die those many small deaths everyone who risks living in God’s image is going to experience. Things that are old will be made new … what has been torn down will be built up again … when life has been sucked out of you there is still more life to live in all its fullness. When we live that life we live the life of the Resurrection. In his earthly life Jesus lived and preached that God wants this Creation to move beyond its limitations into the fullness in which God created it … and that includes you and me. God wants our hearts and souls to see and hear in ways that we could never imagine. God wants us to live beyond the burden of guilt and to know God’s love for us so that we may express our own love in the world around us. And, on this Easter Sunday, after the world killed Jesus on Good Friday, we see the power of God to bring life out of death in his Resurrection.

The fact that the Resurrection is more than just aobut Jesus is clear in our second reading this morning. In our reading from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles we heard about the encounter between Peter and the Gentile centurion Cornelius. Through a vision from God and his conversation with Cornelius, Peter came to realize that “God has shown me that I should never call a person impure or unclean.” Peter went on to say, “I really am learning that God doesn’t show partiality to one group of people over another.” While equality of all people is something that we often talk about in our culture, racism, xenophobia, sexism, and disdain for the poor are still ongoing realities. The belief that God’s love and redemption are truly intended for all people is a belief that can turn our world upside down when it’s put into practice. We are talking about cosmic transformation from a world of injustice, impurity, and violence into a world of justice and peace and wholesomeness and holiness.

Jesus showed us what it really means to love … to love God and to love others … the dispossessed, the outcasts, the marginalized, the stranger, the refugee, the immigrant … so much as to be willing to die for them. Jesus could love in that way because he knew the fullness of God’s love, and he trusted God wherever that love would lead him. After Jesus’ death his disciples understood that love in a way they did not … nor could not … understand or know when Jesus was alive. When the disciples finally understood the depth of that love … and could make it their own … that was when Jesus was alive to them again. That was the moment of the Resurrection.

Today we celebrate the power of God to bring new life out of death, to give us joy instead of weeping, to empower our lives into wholeness after being broken, to throw off the burden of guilt once and for all so that we may live in God’s loving forgiveness. May we all live in the knowledge, and the hope, that God’s power to bring life out of death can be lived in our lives today.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.