

**Easter Sunday
April 20, 2014**

**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 wonderful Easter morning! This sacred space is filled with the beauty of these flowers and the spirit of delightful music. 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. The good news of Easter morning is that the abundant life that Jesus lived as a blessed and beloved child of God did not end with his death, and the grave could not hold it. That is good news for us today. We are blessed and beloved children of God invited to live that same abundant life.

However, things were very different on that first Easter morning.

The first Easter morning according to Matthew: At daybreak on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb expecting to find the body of Jesus to anoint it with spices and ointment. He had died on a cross on Friday, just before the sunset on the Sabbath, so he had been quickly laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. It was a new tomb, hewn out of solid rock, and they had rolled a huge stone in front of it to seal it. The disciples had all fled in fear. Only the women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the unnamed mother of the sons of Zebedee, had stayed until the sorrowful end. There had been an earthquake, and it had been pitch black dark in the middle of the day.

One can only imagine the grief, confusion and fear that the men and women that were called the disciples of Jesus must have experienced in those last days. They had eaten the Passover meal with him, but then when they returned to the garden he was arrested. They had been up all night following him from place to place for the so-called trials. And then he had been beaten and taken away to be crucified. That night after the crucifixion must have been spent in dread and terror. The next day, which was the Sabbath, was probably spent in hiding, and then there was another night of fitful sleep. A full day and two evenings had passed for them to talk about what their life had been like with Jesus, and what they imagined their life was to be like without him.

It was just the women, once again, who fearlessly went to the tomb in the predawn darkness. The tomb was guarded by two soldiers, and just as they arrived there was another earthquake, the appearance of an angel in dazzling

white robes, and it frightened the guards to the point that they fainted as if they were dead.

One has to wonder about the courage of these intrepid women in light of the fearful actions of all the men around them. And one has to wonder about what they were feeling in this surreal experience.

The angel told the Mary Magdalene and the other Mary that Jesus was not in the tomb, but had “risen.” Then the angel instructed them to go and tell the disciples that they would find Jesus back in Galilee. The women “departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy ... “ As if they had not already gone through enough, and filled with these strongly mixed feelings of “fear and great joy,” they encountered the risen Jesus as they ran to tell the disciples. They fell down at his feet, but he told the women “not to be afraid” ... as if these women needed courage ... and then he, too, told them that he would meet the disciples in Galilee.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Today we meet Easter with flowers and organ and song. Yet I hear a different story in the gospels. I imagine the women were both shocked and overjoyed when they met the risen Jesus ... and can you imagine their confusion? They had gone to the tomb expecting a dead body already decomposing. Instead they experienced an earthquake, and an angel, and then the risen Jesus. Someone once defined religion as “trying to make sense of nonsense.” If ever there was something that did not make sense, this was it. What they thought had been behind them was now present and alive. How does one handle such an abrupt reversal of feelings when they are so terribly deep?

What has come to be celebrated by the Church with joy and delight was originally met with confusion and angst. What we honor with our Easter best was first met with a mixture of “fear and great joy.”

The fact is that this is about new life. But new life doesn’t come gently. It has a tendency to shake our lives like an earthquake that moves the ground we stand on. We put our dead lives in a tomb and roll heavy stones over it just so it will stay dead. Except earthquakes in our lives do happen, and often the stone is rolled away ... that stone that we put there to keep our former life in the dark regions of our psyche and soul. New life breaks at dawn after a dark and fearful night. And, like the women in the story, we leave the tomb quickly ... in both fear and awe filled joy.

Sometimes we don’t really want new life, just the old life back again. Remember a couple of Sundays ago when Lazarus was raised from the dead? Lazarus was resuscitated, not resurrected. He came back to life to die again to the same life.

When he came back to life he came back to his old life. In the Resurrection of Jesus we are told that it is a new life.

Jesus said he would meet the disciples in Galilee. The new life for the disciples would be somewhere else, as if it was in another lifetime. And the new life for us, if it is indeed new life, will look vastly different than the one that led us to the tomb.

Yes, there is a God who can make a way where there is no way. Yes, there is a God who can bring life out of death, even that which has been placed in a tomb. Yes, there is a reality stronger than death itself, and it is the love of God. Yes, the God of Resurrection is also the God that brings new life to you and to me.

The good news of Easter morning is that the abundant life that Jesus lived as a blessed and beloved child of God did not end with his death, and the grave could not hold it. That is good news for us on this Easter morning. We are blessed and beloved children of God invited to live that same abundant life. A life so abundant that we include those who are marginalized. A life so abundant that we comfort and bring wholeness to those who are broken. A life so abundant that we can give hope to those who live in despair. And even after death ... those emotional and spiritual deaths that invade our lives while our hearts still beat and blood courses through our veins ... even after death that abundance lives on ... the grave cannot hold it.

The Resurrection is not just something that happened once out at the cemetery 2,000 years ago. That would be all too easy. The Resurrection is something that happens all the time. The Resurrection is something that meets us in the world ... in our own world of families, relationships, jobs, school, church, and the ordinary places like Galilee. This morning we celebrate the Resurrection with glorious music and beautiful flowers in this marvelous sacred space. Yet Matthew is telling us that we will find Jesus not just here, but in the ordinary lives we live after we leave this sanctuary. Matthew is telling us that we will find the risen Jesus in our homes, as we gather with our family, as we walk in our neighborhoods, as we cross the parking lot to the supermarket. Our own Galilee is that place where our own ordinary life is lived ... at school, on the job, in this community of faith. It is out of those places that we are called to a life of abundance by following in the footsteps of Jesus, and it is there that when we open our spirits we will find the new life of the Resurrection ... in all its abundance.

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 knowledge and hope that God has the power to bring new life out of death. That things old will be made new; that what has been torn down will be built up again. 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.

But remember, that new life won't come gently. The ground under your feet will shake. Unless you have the courage of the women at the cross and the tomb this new life may pass you by as if you were as unconscious as the two guards at the tomb. And don't count on it being life as usual. This new life won't look like your old life, and it may not even be in the same place with the same people. This new life is one that will stir both joy and fear. And this new life will take you to places you have never been before.

The women were surprised to find the tomb empty. So, what is the surprise of Easter that awaits you? What is in that tomb that may both frighten you and fill you with joy if it were to be given new life? What kind of earthquake is it going to take to roll back that stone in front of the tomb?

Today we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. He died on a cross. God resurrected him to new life. The witnesses were in fear and awe filled joy. But the Resurrection is just a mere doctrine of our faith unless we also find its truth in our lives. It will require courage. The shaking ground and images of spirits may confuse and frighten us. We may even want to just have our old life back. But God will make a way where there is no way. Yes, there is a reality stronger than death itself, and it is the love of God. We come to church on this day to make our affirmation together because we need each other. New life is a truth bigger than any of us can handle alone.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.