

Easter Sunday (C)  
April 17, 2022  
Text: Luke 24:1-12

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It is such a joy to see you and to be together this Easter morning! We have come through two genuinely hard years. There's been a global pandemic, with all the attendant disruption and worry and isolation. There's been upheaval in our city and nation around issues of race and justice and democracy. Now there's war in Ukraine, on top of any personal challenges and losses we've experienced. So on a day like this, with the sun shining, and it feels like Spring, and such beautiful music, and being together again, it feels like our own personal Easter moment, of being raised up from a dark place to life again. It's truly amazing.

I wonder if we can recognize the beauty and joy of this day is just the merest hint of a suggestion of what God is up to in raising Jesus from the dead on that first Easter morning. It's almost like that first day of the week at early dawn was the beginning of a whole new creation, a whole new world in which life puts an end to death instead of the other way around. In this new creation, love is more powerful than hate, and mercy and forgiveness overcome estrangement. When God raises Jesus, there is healing for every wound and fear is put to flight. And here is what is genuinely confounding about this new world God calls into being—it is coming to life within the same old world we've always known, where greed and fear and brutality rule the day, and death has the last word. God is doing something beautifully new.

One of the things I love about our Gospel story this morning is how it acknowledges how strange it is, even how unbelievable it is, when the women return from their early morning visit to the tomb with their report that Jesus is risen. One of the things we learn in life is that death is permanent. That's why the men dismiss the women's report as nothing more than an idle tale. What the men said was condescending and kind of mean, not to mention just plain wrong, but the men were only speaking from experience. Everyone knows that the dead stay dead. But on Easter, God is doing something new, something unprecedented. God is turning ordinary expectations about life upside down in order to bring life to a dying world.

I imagine sometimes it can be every bit as hard for us to accept the women's witness that Jesus has been raised, that we won't find him among the dead but among the living. Part of the problem is that we belong to a culture that doesn't do a very good job of distinguishing the language of imagination and poetry and faith from the language of science or everyday experience. It helps me to remember that Easter and the resurrection are all about mystery and about experience that defies being measured or quantified or captured by everyday language.

Mystery runs through everything about Easter. The Bible says Jesus rose with a real body—not as a ghost or apparition. But then his body wasn't subject to the limits and constraints that we experience. Jesus wasn't resuscitated, and he wasn't picking up where he left off. He was alive, but in a way that is somehow “more.” As the Risen One, Christ is connected to a whole community of people so that his life now is larger than any individual existence. What I love most about the Easter story is how it invites us to realize that the mystery of Christ's resurrection is something that we know, even if it's difficult to put words to. The mystery of

Easter is part of us, and we are part of it. There are three ways Easter inspires a kind of “aha” moment for us, to know that we have experienced the Risen Christ too. In our own way, we are witnesses to the resurrection too.

First, just as the women heard from the angels a call to remember what Jesus said, remembering is important for us too. Part of experiencing Jesus alive is knowing that when we remember what he said and taught, we are being spoken to by the risen Jesus. I have a friend who used to say that sometimes she felt a little hesitant about coming to church because she was never sure what Jesus would say to her next. In this community, Jesus Christ is a living presence who speaks to us through the words of scripture. And this is what Christ says: you are loved and forgiven. Your life has value, not because of your accomplishments or possessions, but because you are my beloved child. Follow me in my way of compassion and forgiveness so that you can be part of my work to heal this wounded world. A key part of being Christians is letting ourselves be shaped by Jesus teaching, opening our hearts and minds to scripture. This is part of how the mystery of Easter becomes part of us.

Another thing about Easter is that the risen Jesus reveals himself in the breaking of bread. When we share holy communion, when we remember the meal Jesus shared with his disciples on the night he was betrayed, we experience his presence with us in the bread and cup, just as he promised he would be. I remember a friend of mine from New Mexico who was so visibly moved by sharing in holy communion. You could see joy written all over his face. For him, it was peace, it was belonging, it was assurance. It was hope and connection and grace. He realized the risen Christ who met him in the sacrament was somehow the same Jesus who ate with sinners and welcomed outcasts to his table, the same one who provided grace and blessing and forgiveness that was more than enough. When we come to Christ’s table, we find that every child of God is welcome, there is no hierarchy, and status or wealth or achievements matter not at all, just as failures or disappointments matter not at all. A key part of our life in the risen Christ is sharing at Christ’s table, where we know we are loved and forgiven, and where Christ’s hospitality can reshape all of our values and judgments. This is part of how the mystery of Easter becomes part of us.

The third thing that Easter communicates is how important community is in experiencing the risen Christ. Easter comes alive when we recognize how Jesus is now embodied in the people called by his name and who are attentive to his Spirit. In the community that lives by Jesus’ practices of compassion and forgiveness, and humility and generosity and open hospitality, the risen Jesus is alive and present. Together we are the body of Christ, a world-wide body with millions of hands to care and give support, and millions of ears to listen compassionately, and millions of mouths to speak welcome and forgiveness and love. Belonging to the Christian community means we are the body of Christ for each other. That might mean sharing each other’s sufferings and bearing each other’s burdens, as well as rejoicing with each other and celebrating the good gifts of life God gives. This is part of how the mystery of Easter becomes part of us.

Dear people of God, dear, beloved children of God: Easter doesn’t belong only to that one first day of the week long ago when the women came back from the tomb with the shocking word

that Jesus was alive. Easter is more than this one day too. The meaning of Easter unfolds over time for us as we live in Christ. Easter is the mystery that is alive in us, the risen Christ with us as our north star, as our daily strength, as our peace and our wisdom and our hope. Easter is how we are part of God's great healing work to make creation whole, to bring into being a world where life is stronger than death, where love is more powerful than hate, and mercy and forgiveness overcome all estrangement. That Easter reality is coming to life now, in and through you. Thanks be to God. Amen.