

Second Sunday After Easter

April 19, 2020

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Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith. To show forth in our lives what we claim is important to us. That is our prayer for today, and that is a courageous prayer! Words come cheap don't they? We can claim anything as long as we're not put to the test. But what if we are? What then?

Clergy have sometimes been known to complain over the years about how many parishioners skip Holy Week services; how they want their Easter Sunday without first living through Good Friday. They want their resurrection without ever coming near death.

This year the tables are turned for all of us. It feels as if we are being asked to celebrate Easter amidst an endless Good Friday. To believe in resurrections when we are overwhelmed by the horror of death

...Just as the first disciples were.

When Easter came to Jesus' disciples, there were no Easter parades. No community wide egg hunts. Or egg rolls on the White House lawn. When Easter came to the disciples, there were no chocolate eggs or joyous family feasts. No happy frivolous banter among friends about the upcoming baseball season and who would make it to the World Series.

For the disciples, on Easter evening there was confusion and fear and uncertainty. There was huddling together, hiding in a locked room, fearing all that lay beyond those locked doors.

We know what that feels like now. To be afraid to leave our homes. To be afraid to unlock the door lest an uninvited stranger show up. To wait anxiously, we're not even sure what for, not knowing what the future will bring.

But there was one more reality for the disciples in the week after the resurrection, beyond the grief and the fear and the uncertainty. ...There was also hope. Hope that Jesus' resurrection was not just wishful thinking! That it was real. Hope that God had not abandoned them. Hope that the love that bound them to one another and to Jesus was a love that could not be broken, and that somehow, someway that was not yet tangible, and still made no sense: death had not won the day. Evil had not triumphed! Hope that God was still afoot, maybe...possibly...hopefully.

I suspect that for many of you the stories are beginning to accumulate. Stories not just of those who have been afflicted by this pandemic, and not just of the extraordinary men and women who summon their courage, bracket their fear, take off their pajamas, and leave home to care for the sick, to keep food in our homes, to do whatever it takes for them to keep their own families fed and safe in these terrifying days. We have heard those stories and will continue to hear them for months to come.

But now there is accumulating another layer of stories, pain filled stories of dashed dreams, of unexpected personal traumas now lived out alone. Stories of friends and neighbors, coworkers and children who face brutal hardships made all the more brutal by our isolation, our communal grief, and our pervasive anxiety.

The graduations that will not be celebrated. The weddings that have been postponed. The funerals that cannot be held. The marriages that will not survive the stress of these days. The countless children and adults whose medical treatments will be postponed or truncated. The scholarships that may be lost. The homes and businesses and lifelong dreams that are being crushed under the weight of this pandemic. The innocence that has been stolen from our young. These stories are also painful to hear. Even more painful to live. And Easter joy seems to make a mockery of them all. Our claims, our timid professions of resurrection faith ring hollow to our ears in the face of such pervasive suffering!

Unless we can find ways to do precisely what today's collect calls us to do. Unless our lives become the professions of our faith, the witnesses to the truth of the resurrection. Unless who we are and how we live and how we love and who we forgive and what we fight for and what we refuse to tolerate any longer in our society become the vehicles for resurrection to come alive in our souls, in our families, in our communities, and in our society.

The challenge of Easter is to make Easter real and touchable to ourselves and to the world. Just as Easter had to become touchable for Thomas. The challenge of Easter is to proclaim Easter to the world—through our lives. The challenge of Easter is to start living as if resurrection were the God given gift we have received and have the privilege of sharing with the world. Here. Now. When danger is still present. When death still surrounds us. We have Easter resurrection to share. Through our prayers. Through our giving. Through our encouragement of those around us. Through our reaching out to those who are even more alone and hurting and frightened than we are.

Take a minute right now to make a mental list or even better to write down the names of five people who you think might be suffering more than you. Not five nameless entities like the poor, but five actual people. Now write down the name of one individual, group, non-profit organization, or church that you can give to because today they need your money even more than you do.

Now take these lists and use them to make resurrection real. Make Easter happen for someone who desperately needs Easter in their lives. This is what it means to be the church. To stand at the knife edge between life and death and choose life, to choose to look east! Not just to look east, not just to orient one's life to the east, but to move toward the east, toward resurrection life and hope.

Today you are Mary carrying the good news to the world. Today you are Thomas proclaiming with your life, "My Lord and my God!" Today yours are the scarred hands and feet of Christ reaching out to embrace a suffering world. Reach out and show the world Jesus' love, show the world and yourself that Christ lives! That Christ is Risen! Christ is risen indeed!