

Alleluia! Christ is risen! (The Lord is risen indeed!) Today we celebrate the central and essential part of our faith, the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. We are also concluding with joy a seamless service that has lasted three long days. We have taken part in the Passover meal which we re-enact every Sunday at the Eucharistic table. We have witnessed Jesus' betrayal and his abandonment by all his disciples. We have seen him questioned by religious and secular authorities and saw him condemned to death. We watched him suffer on the cross and heard his anguished cry, "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" We watched him die, and we have symbolically witnessed His absence in the stripping of the altar. If this were all that had happened, we probably wouldn't know about this person named Jesus. It isn't all that happened, however, God in Christ triumphed over death and sin. Christ is risen! And Christ's resurrection is all of a piece with his suffering and death, which is why from earliest times, Christians have observed as one service Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

Why not celebrate just the resurrection? Because then we would miss our understanding that God has fully entered into the human experience. God has loved as we love. God enjoyed dinner parties as we

enjoy dinner parties. And God in Christ has subjected the God-self to human shortcomings, sin if you will, and suffered in the most horrible way. God knows us in the most intimate way possible and we know what God is like because of Jesus.

Do you have a hard time understanding or even believing in the resurrection? Join the club! Our Gospel passage provides us with three examples of those who did not understand or believe. Our disciples are not acting in a completely saintly way. Not one of them went to the tomb expecting Jesus' resurrection, despite Jesus' consistent teaching that it would happen. Look at Peter and the Beloved Disciple - they essentially run a foot race to the tomb! John is showing us their impulsive, boyish - even childish behavior.<sup>1</sup> The Beloved Disciple gets there first, but for some reason, he can't make himself go into the tomb and see for himself that Jesus is not there. Peter does go in, notices that Jesus is not there, and also notices that the funeral clothes are neatly set aside, unlike Lazarus' resuscitation, where Lazarus had to be helped out of the gauze that covered his face, hands and feet. And Peter can't seem to take it in. For once, he is speechless. Finally, the Beloved Disciple takes a look around and can

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<sup>1</sup> John K. Stendahl, "Pastoral Perspective," *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2* (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville KY) 2009. 372.

attest to the fact that Jesus isn't there. From the text, it looks like they shrugged and went back home. If they said anything to the nine remaining disciples, it was along the lines of "Mary was right - the body is gone." Resurrection didn't even occur to them.

What about Mary Magdalene? Before it was sunrise on Sunday, she went to the tomb alone. Upon arrival, she discovers that the tomb is no longer sealed and the body is gone. She jumps to a conclusion - "they" have taken him! Who might "they" be? Shortly before the passage we heard this morning, we learn that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took the body for burial. These two men were Pharisees and religious leaders - maybe "they" removed the body for much the same reasons that US Officials buried Osama bin Laden at sea. Perhaps it was Ponticus Pilate or another Roman authority who removed the body for the same reasons. "They," had surely done this.

Have you every noticed how much "they" have inconvenienced us or caused us aggravation? "They closed the Thomas Johnson bridge, now we have to go all the way around to get to Calvert County." "They" are always powers over which we have no control, no authority, no agency of

any kind.<sup>2</sup> My sisters and brothers, the forces of “they”, the powers of this world, “they” are the ones with no control, or authority or agency over our God! We trust this because we know of Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection! Our faith journey is meant to lead us away from “they” and toward Christ. And because it IS a faith journey, we are all on the journey at different places, just like the earliest disciples - which is why our Gospel writers show us the disciples, warts and all, so that we might know whatever we believe, others have been there before us. It’s okay.

Let’s look again at Mary Magdalene. She did not join in the disciples’ foot race, but she also went back to the tomb. She was distraught. The one she loved was not there. Once more she is seemingly alone. She saw angels but apparently did not perceive what she was seeing. The angels ask “why are you weeping,” and with anguish she responds that she does not know where Jesus is - just then she turns around and sees who she supposes to be the gardener. Not until she hear’s his voice, the voice of the Shepherd who’s sheep know his voice, does she recognize him. And she wants to cling to him. But Jesus is telling her she can’t, she musn’t because the resurrection isn’t an ending, it’s a beginning - more will unfold.

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<sup>2</sup> Lance Stone, “Pastoral Perspective,” *Feasting on the Gospels: John vol. 2*, (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville KY) 2015. 310.

Then he gives her a commission, a commission we've all been given - go tell the others! Mary is further along in her faith journey than perhaps Peter and the Beloved Disciple.

By the time we get to the reading in Acts however, Peter seems to have caught up. He can't help himself — he MUST share the Good News. And part of the Good News is his new found understanding that our God is not just the God of the Jews. He now knows that God from the beginning intended relationship with all of creation, and with every nation. He is amazed that God, who fully entered into human life and shared our every experience is interested in and participates in EVERY human life. He is amazed that God loves each and every one of us. God's intent for us is to live - that sin and death do not have a permanent claim on any one of us.

This is still God's intent - God is intimately involved with each of us. May our faith journey leave us convinced of this. May we know that in a world where an ISIS or DASH, whatever they are called, seek to instill fear and terror that they cannot ultimately prevail - the resurrection assures us of this. May we know that our own little faith community will continue to evolve and change. We, like Jesus, may be unrecognizable, however, we

are all participating in resurrection when we live into being a Kingdom people, when we cannot help but share this good news and emulate Christ.

Alleluiah! Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen indeed!