



"A Sanctuary in the City... Living Faith"

*Seeing Christ Again*

April 1, 2018

Easter Sunday

Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:13-35

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Last night while preparing for this morning, I went to a Bible app on my phone. That's when I saw some colleagues texting Easter blessings. It all began with a motion picture message—I don't know the name ... you know a cartoon that moves. A group of people clusters by a cross in this distance. In the foreground a huge boulder falls away from the hillside and out comes ..... jet-pack Jesus! Halo, white robe, and a rocket-fired backpack ... zoom! Boulder pops back up and you can watch it again and again! I don't find that image anywhere in the Bible. Mark and Luke and others don't exactly detail how it all happened. They try to make a real connection about what the resurrection means for our lives. How does God's love touch us and transform the world ... again and again?

{read Luke 24:13-35}

Let's start with the obvious. April Fools Day. It's the first time in my life that Easter falls on April 1st! Lent began on Valentine's when we sang of Christ "What Wondrous Love is This?" It ends with resurrection surprise that would've made anyone expecting it seem a fool. Not a bad frame for our faith.

And knowing you, Easter with April Fools makes me a bit anxious, wary of beloved pranksters among us. Knowing you, who made a little stuffed terrier dog keep appearing unexpectedly in the doorway, the pulpit, or when I opened the font. You

Wolverine fans whom for all I know may have bribed Elizabeth and our fabulous horns to turn pep band for our next anthem playing “Hail to the Victors Valiant! Hail!” Or you, my dear colleague, who with eyes gleaming mischievously envisioned youth popping up in the balconies to launch butterflies upon the pews. Yes, friends, beware! Last Sunday in the park, we flung water to bless palms. Chrissy stood shielded behind me and didn’t get a single drop. Still, she felt gleefully inspired by another minister on Easter who opened the font to fill a supersoaker ... you see where this is going.

Easter Fools Day. Jesus Christ is risen. Alleluia? Anxious and wary. That’s how Mary, Mary, and Salome felt. Tomb opened. Body gone. Stranger talking. Good news not so obvious. According to Mark disciples often react to Jesus’ holiness with fear, when he walked on the sea, stilled the storm, and fulfilled his ministry. Transforming fear into hope and new life—that’s what Jesus did.

The way Mark tells about Easter, that transformation endures in our lives. You see, here’s how the original text Brian read ends in Greek. They went out. They fled. They said nothing, for they were afraid, and ..... That’s it. Mid-sentence, open-ended. Like our lives can feel. Amid incessant transitions. Waiting for reports. Between jobs or relationships. After losing a loved one. And ..... what now?

The sun may have risen, but the women stumble sightlessly head down, hearts heavy, dreams dashed, future dark. At the tomb, they look up. Mark’s double meaning says they start to recover their sight. Like physically blind men Jesus healed, and others figuratively trying to get his parables. Go home, they’re told. Christ goes ahead of you. You will see him appear. You will recognize and relate with him in regular daily life. You see, friends, God’s Spirit that filled Christ arises everywhere, in everyone. God is with us! We live faith by recognizing it and responding with stories of wondrous love we’ve known, grace received. You see,

God's good news doesn't conclude with characters in the Bible. It continues in you and me.

We only get to Easter resurrection through suffering and loss—the cross. So Holy Love persists especially whenever we and others we meet feel like we play the fool. When we struggle to foresee abundant life ahead with our cancer or chronic illness in body or mind. When we walk into a hostile work environment like entering a tomb, or leaving no stone unturned looking for new job possibilities. When life gets clouded by conflict with beloved family or friends, by regrets we bear, or by news we hear. Where are you, God?! Or maybe we hear other people calling us fools for even asking such questions. We feel guilt about our doubts, uncertainties. Friends, such people deemed fools—the bad jokes and stooges of society, the poor, broken, outcast, religiously suspect, the not-good-enough are precisely ones Jesus constantly cares for. And ones the risen Christ comes to.

Trouble is, we don't always see him. I appreciate the honesty and humility of Mark's account; the irony and touch of humor in Luke's Emmaus road story. It's a comfort to us when we're still looking, still longing to see Christ again, still hoping that just maybe it's true in our lives. Yes, we all have times it's hard to recognize God with us; to feel God's love; to see God's way for us to serve Christ in daily life. Stumbling along. Anxious. Wary. Uncertain. Like we're in that tomb with Jesus.

God gets us to look up. To see the stone rolled away. To recover vision for life in the fullness of love and peace. And in relating with others to receive good news of hope and promise. We start to look beyond our own concerns with compassion, generosity, and servant hospitality. That's the way our faith has been since Jesus first called those who followed him, and earliest Christians gathered to share a meal and worship, bringing new friends and strangers with them.

St. Benedict urged all brothers and sisters to receive guests as Christ. Such unconditional love is a blessing. And amid myriad personalities and realities encountered, it can become a burden trying patience, a wearying discipline of grace. In one story, an old monk tells a novice: “I have finally learned to accept people as we know them—whether wise or foolish. Whatever they are in the world, a prostitute, a prime minister, it is all the same to me. But I confess, sometimes I see a stranger coming up the road and I say, ‘Oh, Jesus Christ, is it you again?!’”<sup>i</sup>

According to Luke that’s not quite how the two disciples see it. They recite all the facts of faith. But bleary eyes of the heart blurred by fear, anxiety, exhaustion, loss keep them from seeing the goodness and divine love of Christ in this stranger. “Oh, how foolish,” Jesus laments with a sympathetic smile, “how slow to give your heart.” You see, friends, faith is so much more than words we say or sing in here, or feel at a loss for on our own out there. Easter is not ultimately about explaining resurrection rationally. Easter faith is trusting that the same power of God’s love which raised Jesus to new life touches us and transforms the way we see the world. Softening our hearts amid cynicism. Forgiving past hurts. Giving hope when we frustrated or afraid. God’s love filling our spirits like grand organ music in this sanctuary, or maybe better like a whole congregation together singing Jesus Christ in Risen Today. In relationship we see the risen Christ. We learn to love others as they are. We urge Christ strongly: Stay with us!

On the road to Emmaus, the disciples needed evidence deeper than a surface voice, face and footstep. As we too stretch toward belief, we’re as blind as they until we open our hearts. Then in ordinary hands and bread and healing of life we know the presence of Sacred Grace, so intimately it’s as if Jesus is at table with us. Friends, neither you or I alone are the Christ, the Messiah. Yet in our life together, in the love that binds us, inspires us, moves us we see the Risen Christ appear right here among us. Our hearts burn with the warmth of hope, the light of joy. And we can’t

help sharing the good news, telling others how God has been known to us, or at least speaking with how we give the love we have received on our road of life.

Christ is risen!

Friends, if there's anything in our personal lives or our world that has us groping blindly in despair, give our hearts to the power of God's love, the promise of new life. Declare with me! Alleluia! Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen, indeed! Alleluia!

She told Chrissy this week that every time she sees a butterfly she thinks again of her beloved late husband. They heard last week in worship about a dear friend among us who has entered hospice, they talked right after, then called to coordinate a visit, to anoint him with their find affection. Alleluia! Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Every one of these lilies given in honor and memory show the beauty of Divine Love that has touched us, so often in the form of sacrifice—life poured out in mind and heart and body, like Jesus on the way to the cross. Today we celebrate. Day after day we keep blooming as we radiate that love and cultivate that life in others. Alleluia! Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen, indeed! Alleluia!

When we return again to the classroom, board room and living room, to the office, the store, the lab and factory floor, friends, Christ goes ahead of us. Amid all the concerns and injustice, failures and fear, triumphs and temptations of our world ... we trust the power of Holy Love we share more than money in the bank, more than votes about bills, more than bombs, bullets, and nuclear buttons. Alleluia! Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen, indeed! Alleluia!

More real than pranks with a stuffed animal, knowing you and our life together, dear friends, this day may our hearts cling gratefully to all the ways God's unexpected

grace appears among us. This day, may all our voices sing: Thine is the Glory, O Christ *the* Victor Valiant! This day, may our lives ring out in loving relationship super-soaking all fools, like you and me, with sacred grace. This day, may our humble, good-humored and healing service bring new life and peace to our world like a plague of butterflies launched from this sanctuary to land tenderly on every place and person in all creation. For on this Easter Fools Day we look up and we start see ever anew, like texted greeting repeating again and again: Alleluia! Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Adapted from Kathleen Norris, *Dakota: A Spiritual Biography* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1993), 191.