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Ardmore, Pennsylvania
The Sunday of the Resurrection: Easter Day
April 21, 2019

Lectionary Year C:
Acts 10:34-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
1 Corinthians 15:19-26
Luke 24:1-12

Meeting the living Christ

There is one reason that we are here today. One reason why we gather every Sunday. There is one reason that this beautiful church was built, one reason every church was built, from the most glorious gothic cathedral to the most simple country chapel or storefront church. One reason that Christians have gathered, in large groups and small groups, on every continent, in every conceivable context, from every race and nation, in every age throughout the ages. One reason that our grandparents in the faith read their Bibles and said their prayers and taught their children; one reason the apostles dispersed into the world to tell of the good news of God in Christ; one reason they preached with joyful abandon; one reason their testimony has made it all the way down to us; one reason: because God raised Jesus from the dead.

It wasn't what any of the disciples had been expecting, apparently, even the ones who had been told it would happen. When the sun set on Friday, and Jesus' body was taken away, and the tomb was closed, and (according to St. Matthew), soldiers posted at the entrance to prevent any apostolic funny business—at that point, it seemed like all was lost. It seemed like everything they had dared to hope for, everything they had left behind family for, walked away from jobs for—it had all come to nothing. Worse than nothing: it had come to crucifixion and death, and, who knows, maybe they could be next, their heads on the chopping block.

Only the women, St. Luke tells us, in a detail that will not surprise any observer of human behavior, had the wherewithal to fulfill their bounden duty, to take spices to anoint his body, which the Sabbath restrictions had kept them from doing the day before. But he wasn't there. He couldn't be found in that tomb, or any other. There is no use looking for the living among the dead, an angel told them. He wasn't there. God had raised Jesus from the dead, and he was alive.

The women went to tell the men what they had seen and, in a detail that will not surprise any observer of human behavior, they didn't believe them. But they saw themselves. And, after that, it's no secret what the effect on the apostles was. After they met the risen Christ, the one thing that no one denies is that that group was not afraid of death anymore. After they met him again, on the other side of the grave, his wounds still fresh, calling their names, bidding them peace... after that, they just weren't afraid of death anymore. They would go to every corner of the known world and then farther still, unafraid. They weren't afraid anymore.

They weren't afraid because, in meeting Jesus, they learned something about the world that they didn't know. They learned that the world was created, sustained, guided, and was now being redeemed, by a God who loved them and who wanted to be in relationship with them, and that he would let nothing—not sin, not weakness, not hatred, not indifference, not even death itself—nothing would be allowed to get in the way of God being with them. In him they would find peace. In him, they would find joy. In him, they would find perfect freedom. They learned that the way of

God is the way of love, and that the way of love is the way of the cross, and so they weren't afraid of death anymore. Because God raised him from the dead, Jesus Christ is alive, and they could live with him forever. Alleluia.

Let me put it another way. There was a conspiracy theorist who died, and, after he died, he learned that everyone gets to ask God one question. So when it was his turn, he asked God, "Who killed John F. Kennedy?" God answered: "Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, from a book depository, with a shoddy rifle." The man paused, then muttered, "This goes higher than I thought."

Well, after Easter, the apostles, their descendants, including us, we know that the hope for the world goes higher than we thought. We know that the future for us, broken people, goes higher than we thought. It goes all the way into the very heart of God, a heart overflowing with love for his people, a love that will not be hindered by sin or even death: because Jesus Christ is alive, alleluia.

So, if you worry that we live in a world that has gone to hell in a handbasket; or if you fear that darkness might conquer the light in your own life; or if you are afraid that there are things that you simply cannot deal with, or demons you cannot subdue, or challenges you just can't face: dear friends in Christ, you can live in hope, and in joy, and peace, because Jesus Christ is alive and he will live forever, and you don't have to be afraid of death or demons, or anything else, anymore. It goes higher than we thought. Jesus Christ is alive.

God raised Jesus from the dead, and that living Christ is here, today, with you. He is here in the gathered community of fellowship, service, and worship. He is here in the bread and wine of the Eucharist, his very body and blood for yours. He is here in the spirit, the comforter, who guides and protects and heals. Jesus Christ is alive, alleluia.

He is present in our lives, recognized or not. He is active in our lives, recognized or not. And he surrounds us and fills us with his love, recognized or not. We sinners in need of redemption, we citizens of a broken world, we public people with private pains: God raised Jesus from the dead and so he is alive and he will live forever, alleluia, and he is here for us. It goes higher than we thought. Jesus Christ is alive. Alleluia.

One last thing. While there is one reason why we're here today, in a grand sense, still, in a practical sense each one of us has ended up at this particular place at this particular moment for reasons that are unique, based on whatever the specific details of our lives are. For some of you, this Easter celebration is old hat. For others, it's something you may sort of know about, or vaguely remember from your childhood, but haven't been involved in much recently. For others, it may be entirely new, entirely strange and foreign. Please know that, whatever your individual circumstances are, whatever path you have taken, God has brought you here, or brought you back here, for a reason: to meet, or to meet again, the risen and living Christ. Trust in that. Trust that you're here for a reason.

So, if you are baptized, I encourage you to receive the living Christ today in the Eucharist and be in full communion with the God who loves you. If you are not baptized, and you would like to enter into a deeper relationship with God in Christ through baptism, let me know. We may be able to do something about that. And if you think it's all poppycock, that's okay, too. The apostles thought the same thing and I'm happy to talk about that as well.

I hope that St. George's can be a place where you can meet the risen Jesus. We gather like this every week, and everyone is always welcome. Childcare is available, if that makes it easier, there's a place for the kids to play, and the snacks after church tend to be really good.

God raised Jesus from the dead. He is alive. And we can meet him here, and then live with him, today and forever.

Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed, alleluia.