



“He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples.”

Come. See. Go. Tell. All actions verbs. Our faith is not wrapped up in a bow and we can sit passively in our pew, thinking about the chocolate bunnies to be found and consumed. Or the ham or lamb with all the traditional side dishes that make this holiday a wonderful time to gather with family and friends.

Our opening hymn this morning, *Jesus Christ is risen today*, was written by Charles Wesley. For those of you who have sat through my sermons these last five years, you know by now that hymns are important windows into our theology – our way of talking about and understanding God. Today’s hymns are especially so as we focus on the risen Christ – the new life that Christ brings to us through his death and his resurrection.

Charles Wesley wrote this and about 6,000 other hymns, many of which we still sing today. Charles and his brother John Wesley were Anglican priests who spent some time in the 1700s in Georgia. They later returned to England. John Wesley is now remembered primarily for his conversion experience where he reported that his heart was strangely warmed. That led to his emphasis upon a method of being Christian. That led, in turn, to the denomination across the parking lot: the Methodists.

We Episcopalians are also influenced by a method of being Christian. We use a Book of Common Prayer as an outline for worship. And, wherever you travel in the world, if you step into a church which is part of the Anglican Communion, the service will be familiar whether the language is or not. This is a reminder that we are more than St. John’s Episcopal Church, Crawfordsville Indiana. We are part of the worldwide body of those who profess on this day that Christ has died and Christ will come again. One Lord, one faith, one baptism. Today, especially, we celebrate the words of Paul to the Romans that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God. Nothing that the world can do to us that will cause God to turn from us.

This is the day that we move past the figure of Christ on the cross and to the meaning of the empty cross. We look through the crucifixion to the promise of God that death is not the end. Without the crucifixion though resurrection has no meaning. As someone reminds us: resurrection only works on dead things. Die to self in order to live to Christ.

Is resurrection a once-a-year phenomenon? It is – or perhaps more accurately can be - more than that. Resurrection can be a daily event when we focus on living the life that Christ modeled for us. Each day we can sing “*Jesus Christ is risen today. Alleluia!*” It’s wonderful to be able to sing out “Alleluia” after 40 days of Lent. It’s wonderful to see the sun and flowers begin to become

more the norm, even as this particular winter was not particularly cold although it did have its moments.

Lent is an important precursor to Easter. Lent is the season of the church year – the season of our life – when we stop to take account of how we are living whether that life glorifies God or glorifies us. As human beings, we need this cyclical repetition and reflection on what matters most. We need a time periodically to be refreshed and renewed. Lent provides this time and this space. Lent gives way to Holy Week and thus to the crucifixion and Easter. Time does not stand still and we must not stand still either. Like the disciples, we are to go and find Jesus in the world, not only here within these walls. Go and find Jesus. Go and find the love of God that exists will we or won't we accept it.

The empty cross and the empty tomb are visible reminders that death of the body is not the end. Whether you believe that Jesus was raised from the dead in his body or not, it is undeniable that *something* happened - something so unexpected that for all the days of their lives after that first Easter the disciples preached the good news of Jesus the Christ to those with whom they came into contact. They ultimately each died for that news. *Something* happened following the death of Jesus on the cross that transformed their lives. That something has the power to transform our lives even today. Transformation happened in the sense that who they were before the resurrection is not who they were forever after that day and experience of the risen Christ.

Many people fear death. Over time, that fear begins to overpower how they live. Writers and philosophers tell us that when we live fully, we will lose the fear of death. Anais Nin wrote, "People living deeply have no fear of death."¹ Rabbi Harold Kushner, who is probably most well-known for his book When Bad Things Happen to Good People, says: "I am convinced that it is not the fear of death...that haunts our sleep so much as the fear...that as far as the world is concerned, we might as well never have lived."² We want to be important – we want to make a difference –we want to matter. Jesus is proof positive that a life lived fully and in relationship with God means that we do not have to fear the unknown. We do not have to fear death. Being a disciple of Jesus the Christ means that we matter and we have the potential to have great influence.

This need to feel important – that our life matters – is what drives us to achieve material, social and economic success. Seeking after worldly success can sometimes be a factor in leaving behind the values of Christ for the values of the world. Of making those seemingly small ethical lapses to get ahead never dreaming that one day the price will have to be paid for those wrong choices. The old saying that "the one with the most toys wins" rings hollow when cancer strikes or when our children become estranged from us or when something happens to show us how little we really can control our world. Toys are fun but they don't give life-long meaning. They don't provide lasting satisfaction because there is always going to be another toy to lust after. All you have to do is think about the mad rush when the next iteration of the iPhone is released. We do what we do because we strive for meaning – to make a difference to at least one person.

This day is dedicated to Jesus. A man who lived simply. Jesus influenced our world despite having no home, no retirement account, none of the toys that we simply can't live without today.

¹ <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?tab=wm#inbox/145798cfad734f21> (April 19, 2014)

² Harold Kushner. Anchor, 2004.

His message was simple and yet so hard: love God and love neighbor. Jesus mattered then and he matters now. A life that puts God at the center and the well-being of all creation second is a life that is well lived. Such a life may not be free from pain or sorrow. Such a life will end at least within this physical frame. A life that follows Jesus will be remembered by those touched by a smile, a helping hand, compassion and love.

What we celebrate here today is, in many ways, beyond our comprehension. It is beyond our intellect but not beyond our hearts. Christianity at its best is more than a set of doctrines or dogmas or statements of belief. Christianity at its best is about action. The action of Jesus dying and rising to new life. The action of us, loving and caring for one another as best as we are able, knowing that we do what we do in response to the love that God first gave to us. We cannot earn God's love. God's love is given freely even as we regularly stumble and fail to live up to our potential.

Christianity at its best is about looking through the crucifixion to the empty cross and the empty tomb and knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of God. That we can – this day and every day – shout out: *Jesus Christ is risen today. Alleluia!* And rest in the comfort and love of God all the days of our lives because death is nothing to fear. “The light which the world tried to extinguish cannot be put out. Our candles are lit again proclaiming the transforming power of God. Today let us celebrate and give thanks for new life, new joy and new possibilities as Christ lives within us and among us.

Let us pray:

May the celebration of resurrected life bring new hope to your being.

May the victory over earthly death turn your eyes to the promises of heaven.

May the empty tomb help you to leave your sorrows at the foot of the cross.

So that God's hope, promises and forgiveness reign in your life forever. Amen.³

³From www.prayerscapes.com (used by permission)