



Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!

“It’s a beautiful day in the neighborhood”, Mr. Rogers used to say to open his program. Hard to believe it was 50 years ago that he first aired what was to become an iconic children’s show. Part of what made Mr. Rogers so captivating to children and, really, to all of us, is that he didn’t look down upon the viewers- he didn’t “dummy down” the lessons.

“God never gives you a dream that matches your budget. He’s not checking your bank account. He’s

checking your faith.” Unfortunately, I don’t know the author of that quote- but I wish I did because I expect the author might have had some other pithy sayings from which I could learn. These pithy, but worthwhile considering sayings are all over the internet- one of those rabbit trails that can be rewarding even as you’re not getting done what you started out to do- like writing this Eastern sermon!

Honestly, though, God is checking our faith today. A faith, I believe, that is designed to grow as we grow. God is checking, perhaps, to see if my – if your- faith is deeper than it was last year. What have you learned about God in the last 365 days? Where were you tested when something you thought was true turned out not to be exactly what you thought it was? Have you been open to the world around you and the needs of others?

Faith is not supposed to be static. Rather our faith has the potential to deepen as we walk true to the many ways in which God has called us to be and to do in this world. God calls us to step out in faith and most especially when we don’t know the end game. Jesus called the women and the men of his time to follow him. They did so despite not knowing what following Jesus meant. There were some, though, that fell away as what Jesus was teaching was too hard for them.

It is a reminder that despite the glories of the resurrection that we celebrate today, this day is one that has been preceded by betrayal, pain, suffering and death. There is no resurrection if there is no death – or as Jesus put it in one of his parables: the grain of wheat must fall to the ground and die in order to sprout and live and give one-hundredfold. And as all of us who have planted seeds know, not every seed blooms. Some stay stubbornly dead. Maybe it’s safer than risking being a green shoot that looks good to a nearby bunny. Or if you survive the bunny, there’s always the dog that decides the area you’ve growing in looks like a great and soft place to make a bed and your green tender shoot gets broken as the dog circles around and around to make that safe and soft bed to rest in.

Being a disciple of Jesus is not always a party full of balloons and noise-makers. Being a disciple often includes a period where we walk through the valley of death. The resurrection also happens in the dark.¹ In some mysterious way, sometime between the death on Friday and this Sunday morning, Jesus rose. None of his followers were there. None of us were there. And yet, something happened in the dark period between Friday and this morning light. What had been

¹ With thanks to Debie Thomas for her meditation found at: <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay> (March 30, 2018)

Isaiah 25: 6-9; Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11; Mark 16: 1-8

before was no more. Death was not the end. A new day, with a new understanding of God's power had arrived. And we who believe can walk through our valley of the shadow of death holding before us the promise that we, too, shall have a resurrection at the last day.

I deliberately chose the Gospel reading from Mark over the alternative Gospel of John for this Easter Sunday. Partly because we usually read from John so it's good periodically to mix them up and listen to the less well-known account. We can hear new things or be reminded of old things as the gospels are not 100% the same. We can note what appears in Mark that's not in John – or not in Matthew or Luke. Each gospel was written for a particular audience with a particular set of concerns. Not inconsistent but rather different emphases. So we need to hear each of the gospels to get a fuller understanding of the events of these last days and what they mean for us today. We need to hear the story once again to be reminded of who and whose we are.

The old hymn captures today wonderfully:

I love to tell the story
Of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and his glory
Of Jesus and his love.
I love to tell the story,
Because I know 'tis true;
It satisfies my longings
As nothing else can do.

Today is about remembering or re-telling one of the foundational stories of our faith. God is bigger than death. The very worst that we can imagine does not stop God. The stone that the women were afraid would be too much for them was already rolled away. The body that they had come to anoint before it decayed too much was gone- the anointing was not needed as Jesus transcended human death and corruption.

And the message: “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. ... But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him...”

And so it was. Jesus, crucified, dead and buried has been raised. He was not confined to a tomb. He had gone ahead and was waiting for them. Jesus did not leave them alone and bereft. Jesus has gone ahead and is waiting for us – Jesus is waiting for our faith to deepen and for us to live more fully into love of God and love of neighbor.

Another reason for choosing the Gospel according to Mark is the last verse we read: “And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.” It is Jesus, himself, the one who rose from the dead on this day, who sends them – and who sends us – out into all the corners of the earth to proclaim that He is risen. He is risen indeed. And through Him we can claim eternal salvation or as we more colloquially phrase this, eternal life.

Isaiah 25: 6-9; Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11; Mark 16: 1-8

Jesus proves to us who believe, through his resurrection, that this physical body, this physical life, is not the beginning or the end. That God has been from before time. That God is beyond time. As our Burial service says: “For none of us has life in himself, and none becomes his own master when he dies. For if we have life, we are alive in the Lord, and if we die, we died in the Lord. So, then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s possession” (BCP 491). And from the Proper Preface: “For to your faithful people, O Lord, life is changed, not ended.”

The Society of St. John the Evangelist has been offering daily meditations during Lent. For Holy Week, they broadened and deepened their offerings. Brother Luke Ditewig offered this for our consideration:

Since much of life keeps killing us, we need Jesus’ power to turn often, return to sight, to life, to love. How do we experience resurrection power in order to face tomorrow?

Look back. Draw on your memory. ...

Resurrection comes small like seeds and leaven. One little word of encouragement, one affirmation, perhaps evoking one smile or laugh. One little gift can change us. ...

Memory is the wellspring of hope for the future we cannot see. Memory is the wellspring of hope for the future we cannot see. ...

Look back to remember. Look up to give thanks. Look forward in hope. ...²

The Lord is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

² <https://www.ssje.org/2017/04/16/calling-by-name-br-luke-ditewig/> (March 30, 2018)