

Easter Sunday 2015

Acts 10:34A, 37-43 *We ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.*

Romans 6:3-11 *If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall live with him.*

Psalm 118 *The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.*

John 20:1-18 *Mary Magdalen told the apostles, "I have seen the Lord."*

♪ **Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,
Wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
LOVE IS COME AGAIN LIKE WHEAT ARISING GREEN.
When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
Your touch can call us back to life again,
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
LOVE IS COME AGAIN LIKE WHEAT ARISING GREEN. ♪**

It has been a long winter, and it might snow tomorrow, but I can feel spring waiting to burst out. Life is rising on the earth as we celebrate the resurrection of Christ.

In the Gospel today, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb before the sun had risen. She sees that the tomb is empty and runs to tell Peter & the beloved disciple. The two of them run to the tomb as the sun is rising.

And, at first, they do not understand the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus for their own lives. Do we understand, even now, after 20 centuries?

I believe that we cannot experience the resurrection of Jesus as a part of our own human life until we have experienced being in the tomb ourselves.

Paul writes to the Romans today: "We were indeed buried with Christ through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection."

He is writing about their experience of Baptism as adults, which was a choice that came at great cost in the culture of their time. The choice to be a follower of Christ still can mean risking your life - in some places in Africa and Iraq.

We may not have experienced Baptism as rising from the dead, but we get the chance to experience living our lives as baptized believers, and sometimes we may feel like we are in the tomb.

Mary of Magdala felt that way. She had stood at the foot of the cross, watching as the one she loved more than anyone in the world was tortured and executed by the soldiers of an occupying government in collusion with the leaders of her own religion. She went to the cemetery to care for the body of the one she loved, and finds him missing, apparently stolen. She is in the tomb of her grief.

It is only then that she is ready to hear her name, "Mary", and to experience resurrection from her grief, despair and separation. After that, she meets the risen Christ, and goes to the apostles. When she gets there, she preaches the first sermon of the Christian church, saying "I have seen the Lord" and then telling them what Jesus had said to her.

Simon Peter was in another kind of tomb - the tomb of guilt. He had denied his hero, the one he loved and who loved him. He had *resisted* that love when he, at first, had refused to let Jesus wash his feet. He had *run away* from that love when he let fear control him in the High Priest's courtyard. He was in a tomb of his own making, a tomb we are all somewhat familiar with, the tomb of sin.

He did not fully understand the resurrection of Christ until he met the Risen Christ and experienced being forgiven. He speaks of his understanding of the resurrection in the first reading when he says, "*everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name.*" He certainly knew what he was talking about.

The disciple Jesus loved was the first one to believe what he saw. The *beloved disciple* - the one who sat next to Jesus at the Last Supper, who stood at the cross and came to the tomb is never given a name in John's Gospel. The ones who are not named in the fourth Gospel stand for us. We are disciples whom Jesus loved.

Some say that this disciple was Lazarus. Lazarus was certainly **one** of the disciples Jesus loved, and he certainly understood what it felt like to be in the tomb. And even before Jesus called him out of the grave, he had experienced the tomb of illness. After he had been raised, he knew what it felt like to be persecuted and oppressed just like Jesus. But through it all, he had experienced the love of Christ. And as he was loved, so we are loved. Christ loves us to death. He chose to accept death rather than deny love. And his resurrection defeats death itself.

We can experience being in the tomb in many ways. Last year I was walking with a cane, if you remember, I used the light on my cane to read the prayers at the Easter Vigil at the new fire. And this past December I had a gall bladder attack and went into a tomb called a hospital where it was removed. I spent the next month in the tomb of recovery from the surgery and the anesthesia that went with it.

On this Easter Sunday, we are called to face our own guilt and grief and pain and to trust that it can be the seed of new life.

We are called to admit our weakness, to admit that we can feel as fearful as Peter, as despairing as Mary of Magdala, as dead as Lazarus.

Then *we* will be ready to understand the Resurrection of Jesus, because it can happen to us, not because of our faith or virtue, but by the love of God poured out through Christ.

There is an Easter hymn that sings itself in me at this season. The words are in Spanish, but the refrain is simple: *Resucito, alleluia*. He is risen, alleluia! The words to the first verse mean, in English, "*Death, where is death, where is my death, where is its victory?*" Will you sing it with me?

♪ *Resucito, resucito, resucito, aleluya. Aleluya, aleluya, aleluya, resucito!*
La muerte, donde esta la muerte? Donde esta mi muerte? Donde su Victoria? ♪

[After the homily, the congregation renews the promises that were made at Baptism. These are the words which introduce that ritual]

Do you know why we renew our Baptismal promises at Easter?

In the early church, Lent came into being as a time for most people to prepare for their baptism at the Easter Vigil. In 2013, we celebrated the initiation - Baptism, confirmation & communion - of two young members of this parish, Abby & Joseph. Today we are all invited to renew the promises that were made in our name, and which we confirmed as we grew up.

It is like an anniversary of a wedding, when a couple renews the promises that they have lived over the years of their marriage. Lent is a time for everyone who is baptized to look at our lives to see how we are living our baptismal promises - how we are living the Gospel of Jesus Christ. On Easter - at the vigil and on Sunday morning - we celebrate and renew the promises that were made at our baptism. That is what Easter is all about.

As we renew our Baptismal promises, we will be asked some questions. You do not need to follow the words, all you need is the courage to respond, "I DO", but our response is not complete until we begin to live what we say in words. You have already begun to live those words by coming here today, but we are all challenged to carry that life out from here to our families, to our community, to the places where we work and to the world.

When we say "I DO" to the words: "Do you believe in God the Father..."

We are saying that the whole human race is one family and that we are all brothers and sisters. We are also accepting the responsibility to care for creation the way God cares for the earth he called "good."

When we say "I DO" to the words that begin: "Do you believe in Jesus Christ..."

We are saying that we cannot save ourselves but we believe he has won victory over death *without resorting to violence*. We are saying that we will commit ourselves to follow the way of the Prince of peace, and that we accept him as our only judge.

When we say "I DO" to the words: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints..."

We are saying the same creed as our brothers and sisters in the other Christian churches (since the word "catholic" in the creed does not mean only Roman Catholic, it has the literal meaning of "universal" & refers to everyone who believes in Jesus - that is why it is not capitalized). We are saying that we trust in the power of God's Spirit to forgive our sins and to heal our divisions on earth and even to bridge the gap between us and those who have died, and are now a part of the communion of saints.