

Easter Day
St. Andrew's, Methuen
April 4, 2021
William Bradbury

Acts 10:34-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
1 Corinthians 15:1-11
John 20:1-18

Think about the pictures of the resurrection we saw growing up. The Risen Jesus is standing by himself, maybe carrying a flag or with his hand raised. Maybe in the background you see Mary Magdalene or the sleeping guards, but it is clear that resurrection is only about Jesus.

Easter in our culture has become **the day when something miraculous happened to a dead Jew, but it has little impact on us in the here and now, except to tell us that when we die, we will go to heaven.** This gives us the perfect ending to the American dream: prosperity in this life and heaven in the life to come.

But when you look at the pictures of resurrection in the ancient artwork of the Eastern Orthodox Church, we see something quite different. In those paintings and mosaics the risen Jesus is depicted pulling Adam and Eve out of the tomb with Hades, their jailer, shackled and crushed under the gates of Hell.

Resurrection is not just about something that happens to Jesus 2000 years ago, but it is about God transforming the whole human race, the whole cosmos. Resurrecting Easter, John Dominic and Sarah Crossan

And it begins with the disciples after their encounter with the Risen Christ: they don't return to a life of comfort to wait till they die so they can go to heaven. No, they become a community filled with the Spirit of Christ and called "the Body of Christ" that seeks to bring heaven to earth.

The disciples, like Jesus, are given the Spirit to heal the sick, feed the poor, forgive sins, and challenge the government to reflect the justice and peace of God.

As N. T. Wright puts it: "Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of God's new project, not to snatch people away from earth to heaven, but to colonize earth with the life of heaven. That is what the Lord's Prayer is all about." Surprised by Hope p 293

"Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done... **ON EARTH** as it is in heaven."

We see this transformation begin with **Mary Magdalene before Good Friday and Easter. Luke's gospel tells us that** Jesus frees her from seven demons—maybe she had addictions or PTSD or clinical depression. Once healed she follows Jesus and helps pay for his ministry.

This morning she goes to the tomb to grieve the man who saved her, but instead resurrection continues her transformation into New Creation.

 Methodist Bishop and author Will Willimon writes about a dying man he visited in the hospital. He says, "I asked him...what he was feeling. Was he fearful?

Fear? No," he responded, "I'm not fearful because of my faith in Jesus."

"We all have hope that our future is in God's hands", Willimon said somewhat piously.

"Well, I'm not hopeful because of what I believe about the future...I'm hopeful because of what I've experienced in the past."

Willimon asks him to say more.

The man says:

"I look back over my life, all the mistakes I've made, all the times I've turned away from Jesus, gone my own way, strayed, and got lost. And time and again, he found a way to get to me, showed up and got me, looked for me when I wasn't looking for him. I don't think he'll let something like my dying defeat his love for me."

That's a man being transformed by resurrection. Undone By Easter: Keeping Preaching Fresh page 48.

 Easter is not an idea, but an encounter with Jesus Christ, who as Willimon says, **"lived briefly, died violently, and rose unexpectedly"** and is still saving the wrong people—including people like us.

 The Risen Christ is pouring out the same Spirit of Resurrection on us today—**BUT not so we can get back to a pre-pandemic normal, inside our comfortable and conventional box!**

We must not become like the businessman in the New Yorker cartoon: He is ready to leave home for work and he leans over and tells his cat: "Don't ever, ever, think outside the box."

If we never think outside the box, we will miss the transformation of Resurrection that calls us outside the box of the tomb.

 But--If Easter is **only** about how Jesus saves me and mine, we've missed the larger story of what God is doing. Certainly, Mary Magdalene wants her time with Jesus at the tomb to never end, but Jesus tells her, **"do**

not hold on to me” for there is work you need to do: “go tell the others you have seen me.”

The new life of Resurrection is always to be shared.

Back in the 1970s my U. S. congressman in the 5th district of Atlanta was Andrew Young, who had been an assistant to Martin Luther King. Young recalls that in 1964 King was in jail in Birmingham, so they planned a march from New Pilgrim Baptist Church to the city jail for the afternoon of **Easter Sunday**.

They set off, 5000 strong dressed in their Sunday best, until suddenly they run into the police and firemen with hoses blocking their way.

Young said they didn't know what to do so he asked the people to get down on their knees and pray...But suddenly Rev. Charles Billups, jumped up and hollered, **“The Lord is with this movement! Off your knees! We're going on!”**

Bull Connor yelled to his men, “Stop `em, stop em!”

“But” Young said, “none of the police moved a muscle...Even the police dogs ...were now perfectly calm....[and] I saw one fireman, tears in his eyes, just let the hose drop at his feet. Our people marched right between the red fire trucks, singing, “I want Jesus to walk with me.”

Young says that he'll never forget one old woman who became ecstatic when she marched through the barricades. As she passed through, she shouted, **“Great God Almighty done parted the Red Sea one mo' time!”** Page 229-230 Rutledge

Why does Mother Theresa in 1948 pick up that first outcast dying on the streets of Calcutta?

Resurrection.

Why does St. Andrew's help a church in Tanzania?

Resurrection!

Why does a teenage girl at a rally in Chelmsford in 2018 carry a sign that says: **“They tried to bury us. They didn't know we were seeds.”**

Resurrection!

Easter is not just about what happened to Jesus 2000 years ago. It is about God's ongoing project of bringing heaven to earth through people like you and me.

As we open our hands to receive communion today—and won't that be wonderful—let us also open our hearts and say ‘Yes’ to Resurrection.