

Sermon
Easter Sunday
St. Andrew's, Methuen
April 17, 2022
William Bradbury

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

The angels said to the women at the tomb, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

They might answer that they went to the last place they saw him. They knew the body of Jesus was in the cemetery Friday night, so that's where it should be on Sunday morning.

It's what we do, as well. We gather at the remains of our memories, hoping to recreate what is gone, **because it's hard to imagine a new future.**

Back in October I gathered my kids and grandkids at a rented beach house in Atlantic Beach, North Carolina to celebrate my 70th birthday. I chose that place because it was where we took numerous vacations when

the kids were little. It is a place of beauty yes, but also a place of glorious memories.

Some of us go to church on Easter and Christmas hoping that nostalgia for times past will send some energy into our lives.

And can't we all use some energy in this present moment that is so hard to bear?

We've had over two years of Covid which we all fear is getting ready to make another run at our health and happiness.

We have the ever-increasing destruction of Mother Earth: a report on WBUR said, "in Boston there were 7 days of high tide flooding in 2019. By 2050 there may be up to 95 days."

I wonder how long before the runways at Logan are underwater?

And now, out of nowhere, we have this unprovoked, criminal Russian invasion of Ukraine, in which every day we see ugliness destroy beauty.

In the face of all this trauma we can be forgiven for wanting "the good old days" and a cup of nostalgia to brighten our lives.

There is no sin in remembering with gratitude good people in good times. My family and I had a wonderful time at the beach.

But there is a problem when we live **only** in the past, always with the remains of what used to be alive but is no longer.

Beatrice Bruteau offers the metaphor of coral, which we think of as “a kind of pinkish stone in reefs or on beaches and which can be polished and set into jewelry”.

The biologist knows, however, that coral really means the little animal, called a polyp, that leaves behind the stony mass that had been its skeleton. **“The polyp itself is not hard and fixed, it is a mass of soft, moving protoplasm, interacting with its environment.”**

We often think of our own lives as static, fixed, externalized, accumulated matter. We build up our lives as the polyp builds up its reef and then **we think of ourselves as the reef that has been built up instead of thinking of ourselves as the living act that from moment to moment is our life and is adding on to the reef.”**

Bruteau says we might find it exotic to imagine, but the fact is that we are making our life “just as the next moment is coming into existence”. The

Therefore, we must pay attention to the angels when they say, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? **He is not here, but has risen.**"

Because Jesus is among the living, Easter invites us to live moment to moment where the Risen Christ is. **If we think of the resurrection only as an event in the past then we are still stuck in the cemetery looking for a dead Jesus: He is not there, he is risen.**

On the cross God in Christ enters fully all that afflicts our lives—illness, decay, and death—in order to transform us through resurrection. It is a mistake for us to live on the stern of the ship of our life staring behind us, when God is meeting us in the bow with what is coming to us now.

Jesus sacrifices his life to the powers of Empire in order to reveal God's eternal, unconditional loving character—which is always **for us**.

The Risen Christ reveals that not even sin and death can conquer God's Life in us and for us.

Nothing in your past can ever keep God's crucified love from you.

Even if we've built a large reef of ugly coral, the Risen Christ is meeting us here and now, calling us to leave the cemetery of what was and to awaken to the Living One holding us in the eternal love of God.

I think about Jesus's short parable: "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost **until** he finds it?"

Until is the key word: Christ looks for us **until** he finds us.

Today is a good day to be found by Christ!

As one writer puts it, "God wants you home more than you want to be home."

Easter isn't a celebration of an event long past, but a celebration of the Living One who today is our Resurrection and our Life.

Many of you may have seen the cellphone video of a young Ukrainian woman in winter jacket and knit hat who sits at her white grand piano, and begins to play a Chopin Etude. As the camera pulls back you realize she is sitting in a house recently hit by a Russian missile. Windows and doors are blown out; her piano is covered in dust. Then outside you see the horror of a neighborhood destroyed.

N. T. Wright says of her playing the piano: It is “a small piece of performance art, an act of new creation amid the ruins.”

This is what God is doing throughout Jesus’s ministry. As he heals and forgives, Jesus is forming a community of friends—poor and rich, Black and white, gay and straight, Jew and Gentile—all One in Christ.

Finally, as Wright says, in Jesus’s death and resurrection God “is sitting down defiantly at the keyboard to play, even amidst the rubble, the unstoppable music of new creation.”

Luke tells us that the women, remembering Jesus’s words, leave the tomb, to tell what has happened to the eleven and to all the rest.

They are our model: we are to stop looking for the living among the dead, and be performance artists of Resurrection in a world caught between “the ruin of the old and the birth of the new.”