

Easter, Yr. A

April 12, 2020

Matthew 28: 1-10

One of my favorite Easter stories is the one about the little boy grumbling about going to church on Easter, new shoes too tight, new tie pinching his neck and him complaining that it's the same story and the same ending every year. And to that I say both Thank God and Alleluia, the Lord is Risen!

Last year, I used the word "joy" as the theme for the Easter sermon. This year I have two words. The first is 'broaden' although I'm a bit hesitant about that one having seen some of the jokes going around about the broadening that's occurring as we make more frequent trips to the refrigerator in these days of quarantine! But hang on to that one anyway. And the second is simply "yes" because I'd like us to think about all the ways in which God says that life-giving yes to us and to all creation especially in the Resurrection.

There's a lot of conversation these days about getting back to normal: will we ever? Will there be a new normal? Has this crisis shown us the cracks in the political system or in the health system that will give us an opportunity to move further along the path to being the kind of country we have always aspired to be? Stick with the idea of normal for a minute. Because normal certainly wasn't what the disciples experienced on

Easter morning. Matthew paints a pretty vivid picture: an earthquake, an angel coming and rolling back the huge stone, an angel so startling with his appearance like lightning and his clothing as white as snow, that the Roman guards fainted dead away at the sight. You can almost see him, can't you? Sitting there on top of the stone, maybe even grinning, although I don't know if angels do that, but certainly looking like a being from another world, glowing. Not your usual Sunday morning experience! And he says what angels always say: Don't be afraid. And then he adds, I know you are looking for Jesus. He's not here; for he has been raised. Not your usual Sunday morning sermon either.

Rowan Williams, the former ABC, says that Easter is the second Big Bang, a surge of divine energy as fiery and intense as that at the very beginning of the Universe. Because this is the new creation – God's kingdom breaking in to our weary world. Can we see it that way? One theologian has said that there are two ways to look at the world. The first is to focus on the wars and violence, the suffering and death. From that point of view, Easter seems like some extraordinary, stunningly contradictory event. But what if we saw Easter instead as the starting point, this new reality about how God treats those he loves. Then in this new creation, human history becomes the exception and Easter a preview of our new reality. And here I would say the word 'broaden' applies because this requires us to broaden our

vision about what's going on and the word "yes" also applies because this is God saying YES to all creation.

I'd like to go back to broadening for a minute. We're living in pretty challenging times, certainly not "normal" times as we have known them. And because of that, we are being asked, given the opportunity if you will, to rethink some things.

First of all it's to recognize how fragile this whole enterprise that we usually take totally for granted, actually is. In a recent issue of The Economist, the author talked about the stunning truth that a microbe 10 one thousandth of a millimeter is threatening whole societies. Surely this brings us up short and causes us to be more conscious and more careful of our world and one another.

And second, we're asked to broaden our vision to recognize how dependent we are on one another. Think of all those heroes in the medical profession who do their utmost to keep us safe. Or think of all those unknown people in the food chain. How many people are involved in that Easter dinner we took for granted for so many years? The broader vision shows us how dependent we are on one another and how necessary it is that we recognize, appreciate and value each other.

Then, there are broader understandings of church. This enforced separation and the fact that we are connected without being able to come together physically asks us to think

more deeply, or more broadly if I'm going to stay with my word, about what it means to be church. Sunday morning here at St. Luke's – yes, but more than the building, more than the time our community spends together, CHURCH means the Body of Christ or the People of God. Anchored in our beliefs and in our community, we can go beyond limitations of time and space and actually BE God's presence in our world, BE God's hands and feet, whether we're offering comfort, delivering food, making masks or telephone calls, volunteering to help where we can, daily praying for others – all of that broadens what it means to be church.

Part of the challenge these days is lack of the Eucharist. But there too, we can come to a deeper understanding of that by recognizing that a sacramental action is something that brings us into the awareness of God's presence. So, eating mindfully and prayerfully and in gratitude for what we have been given can become a sacramental action. There's a saying about this: ONE EATS IN HOLINESS AND THE TABLE BECOMES AN ALTAR. This is another opportunity to broaden our awareness – to develop the kind of sacramental consciousness that helps us to see God everywhere.

And then there's the reality of the Resurrection. Here the challenge is to move it from some kind of intellectual and theological concept to something that MATTERS, to something

that transforms us, that changes the way we see the world and the way we live. We hear that in the reading from Paul. SINCE YOU HAVE BEEN RAISED WITH CHRIST, he says, SEEK THE THINGS THAT ARE ABOVE. In the Orthodox service, the language around Easter is that death has been TRAMPLED DOWN BY THE RISEN CHRIST. What does it mean to trample down death? Nothing less than to set our minds on things that are above: to confront all that is death-dealing in the world: greed, despair, poverty, hunger, violence, war, oppression, the neglect of the poor and vulnerable. It's one thing to nod our heads in agreement that that is what Christ has done. But the truth is that because we have been raised with Christ, we, too, are called to that same kind of vision, that that same kind of life. Here that exercise of broadening may mean that we take the idea of the miracle of the Resurrection and begin to see all the miracles of new life that surround us, seeing what we could call ordinary Resurrections.

Sounds good, right? Always though there's the question of what that looks like for us. Carlos Caretto has this meditation:

When the world seems a defeat for God and you are sick with the disorder, the violence, the terror, the war on the streets; when the earth seems to be chaos, say to yourself, "Jesus died and rose again on purpose to save and his salvation is already with us."

Every newly opened leper hospital is an act of faith in the resurrection.

Every peace treaty is an act of faith in the resurrection.

Every agreed commitment is an act of faith in the resurrection.

When you forgive your enemy,
when you feed the hungry,
when you defend the weak, you believe in the resurrection.

When you have the courage to marry,
when you welcome the newly-born child,
when you build your home, you believe in the resurrection.

When you wake at peace in the morning,
when you sing to the rising sun,
when you do your work with joy, you believe in the resurrection.

Here's another resurrection story, told to me by George and Sue Raye. Friends of theirs have an 11 year old grandson, Maxx, who, a couple of weeks ago, was hit by a train. The first miracle was that he lived. The second was that he came out of a coma and appears to be doing okay. The third was that when he fully regains consciousness he will be given a letter that came for him from a Cubs baseball player, Anthony Rizzo, who wrote to give him support and courage by telling him that when he was 18 he was diagnosed with lymphoma. He said it was a scary time, but he made it through and that Max should stay

positive and love his family and friends. There was also a picture of 10 kids from Maxx's class who shaved their heads to show him that they are walking through this with him. Good examples of both ordinary resurrections and of people saying yes to life.

And finally, there is that word "YES." What we surely know of God is that God says "YES" to all creation, including humankind.

The creation itself was a YES to life and God saw that it was very good. The incarnation, when God took on human form, when it was made clear that heaven and earth are connected, was another loving YES. And the resurrection in which Jesus' life and message of love were totally vindicated, over and against those who tried to stamp that message out by killing him, and in which we are assured that as he was raised, we shall also live, is yet another YES. And that assurance, that YES, allows us to live freely, generously, fearlessly – as yes-sayers and life-givers. Alleluia! Christ is Risen and so have we! Amen.