

4.17.2022 Easter Day

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Acts 10:34-43, Psalm 118, 1 Corinthians 15:19-26, John 20:1-18

“Christ is Alive!”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed, Alleluia! When you think of Easter what things do you think about? What memories or associations do you have? Do you think about hiding baskets, Easter eggs and chocolate bunnies? My own memory about such things is of the joy my father had in hiding Easter baskets for us even after we were long past childhood, and he was very good at hiding them.

Perhaps you have memories of many Easters with loved ones who are no longer alive. Such memories are a gift. I think about family and friends who have died and I think about my hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I hope that I will, one day, also attain the resurrection of Christ, and be able to see these many beloved saints again.

Christ is alive, and Easter is the “moment” each year that we celebrate the gift of living in his presence every single day. We know that Christ is alive in our hearts because we feel faith burning in our hearts. Others around us also know that Christ is alive because Christ lives in our voices and in our hands as we seek to be living signs of “Easter hope” in a broken world in great need of such hope.

All of you have come together today as Christ’s visible and living body, the church, praising God for the living presence of Christ alive in us. Easter is both a present reality and a future hope. For me, the words of a hymn sung by Mahalia Jackson, *My God is Real*, capture what I believe: “I’m sure of this one thing: That God is real for I can feel him deep within.” Like the two disciples met by Christ on the road to Emmaus on Easter evening, after recognizing Christ in the breaking of the bread, said, “*Did our hearts not burn within us while he talked to us on the road?*” Christ is alive, for I can feel him burning deep within.

On the first Easter, there were, of course, no baskets, eggs or any of our cultural signs of this holiday. There was simply the astounding realization and message that the one who had been crucified and had died, had now been raised from the dead.

On the first day of the week Mary came to the tomb early while it was still dark, perhaps between four and six in the morning, because she did not want to let go of one whom death had

taken from her. Because the stone had been rolled away, and the body was missing, Mary ran in haste and fear to get Simon Peter and John.

The very idea of resurrection as a new and living reality was not at first apparent to Mary. Standing at the tomb after the disciples had returned home, Mary said to the one whom she thought was a gardener, “*Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.*” Mary simply thought that the body had been laid elsewhere.

The other disciple whom Jesus loved, the one who is traditionally thought to be John the Evangelist, saw and believed, but the text also says, “*for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.*” In the gospel text, belief and not understanding are held in tension. The beauty of John’s gospel is that it preserves the paradox of faith and doubt, something we also see in the risen Jesus’ encounter with Thomas. Matthew’s gospel, too, on the mount of the Ascension contains this tension as well, as they knelt and worshiped the risen Jesus, “*yet some doubted.*”

There is nothing wrong with faith and doubt existing together; they are both here in the gospel witness. The reality of the resurrection is something about which we struggle to express because our words and all of our explanations are inadequate. How many of you have faithfully come into this sanctuary, or perhaps a church elsewhere in the world, believing that God is in this sacred place, but also burdened with the fears and doubts of life? All of us live between the security and confidence of faith and moments when the reality of faith has been shattered.

The disciple John saw and believed, but he did not yet understand the living presence of Jesus. The faith of Easter is something all of us spend a lifetime growing into. We spend a lifetime of moving from doubt to faith, from faith to doubt and back again. We spend a lifetime of living through the “small deaths” of failure and mistakes, and rising again and again to “resurrection moments” of forgiveness, healing and hope. These moments strengthen and prepare us to die believing the unbelievable message of the Good News that Christ is alive.

Mary, her eyes clouded by tears and her heart heavy with grief, could not recognize Jesus standing before her. Mary did not dare to wonder, “Could it be him?” Only his voice, saying her name, transformed Mary’s grief and doubt into faith. Mary became the first evangelist, the first to proclaim the Good News that Jesus Christ is alive, risen from the dead.

I cannot celebrate Easter, however, without also remembering Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15, “*The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*” Like you, I have seen the heartbreaking images of the

dead left in streets and found in mass graves in Ukraine. Easter must also speak to the great suffering of humanity throughout the world. In those streets, and in our own streets, evil and death continue to haunt our lives. Paul's words are also words pointing to the future hope that we share in Christ's resurrection when his kingdom will be complete "*after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and every power.*" To believe in the resurrection means knowing the power of Christ alive in our hearts and looking forward toward the end of all human history when Christ will "*put all his enemies under his feet.*" This is the Easter hope in its widest scope: there will be judgment for authorities, powers and rulers who have been the enemies of Christ.

All who die share in the hope of Christ – older loved ones who have lived a long and faithful life, young ones murdered in their prime on the streets of our nation, or the men, women and children murdered in another part of the world – all who die share in the hope of Christ who has died so that death, the last enemy, might also be destroyed.

Today we remember Mary, who told others, "*I have seen the Lord.*" Easter is the profound celebration that every day has meaning because Christ is alive burning in our hearts.

To be a Christian is so to live that when others hear our voices or see our actions, they too will say, "*I have seen the Lord.*"

Death is the last enemy – each day may our lives, voices and actions destroy death as Christ lives in us.

Christ is alive! Each day, live in the sure and certain hope that he lives in you.

Christ is alive! Each day allow his life to destroy death, giving hope to others. Amen.