

Christ, the Lord, Is Risen Today!

Mark 16: 1-8; 1 Corinthians 15: 1-8, 11

Christ the Lord is risen today! Today is Easter and God's promised new creation is revealed in our presence. Today, we are celebrating Easter in the middle of an out of control, frightening, unjust, and very broken world. The new age of God is alive.

The resurrection of Jesus was the pivotal event of the Christian story. That event is strange to us. It doesn't make sense. After all, death and taxes are the only sure things, aren't they? Because of Easter, we now call into question the ultimate power of death.

Resurrection was an event in the past. The earliest record we know about is included by the Apostle Paul in the first letter we have to the Corinthian church. Paul is telling the Corinthians that Jesus is alive. They can count on the truth of Jesus' resurrection because Paul and others have seen him and experienced his resurrected presence. They testified saying, essentially, "We know and you have seen the results in our lives and even in your own.

Today, you and I can count on the truth of Jesus' resurrection because the Christian Church still exists. Despite the death of Jesus, the church exists. Despite early persecution and despite the church being co-opted by Constantine and the Roman Empire, it exists. Despite evils done in the name of the Church over the centuries, the church is still here with the message hope, still here with the Spirit of the living Christ present among us.

We sing, "Christ the Lord is risen today. Alleluia"! Praise to God. Resurrection is an event of the present. We believe in the resurrection of Jesus because many of us have experienced his presence in our lives – and we're experiencing it today.

Around the time of the Apostle Paul's death, in the 60's CE, Mark's gospel appeared. It told the events of that first Easter in a very human and a very compelling way. (ideas drawn from *Binding the Strong Man*, Ched Myers).

Jesus was dead and the disciples vanished into hiding. Jesus' body had been taken down from the cross. Crucifixion was a grisly form of execution, not only because of the obvious -- nails driven into the body, suffocation, and exposure -- but also because, after death, the bodies were often left as carrion for scavengers. There was usually no burial for those crucified.

Things were different in Jesus' case. Joseph of Arimathea, with the cooperation of the authorities, had Jesus' body placed into a nice tomb after being wrapped in a nice linen shroud. They gave Jesus a proper burial and closed up the tomb with a large stone. It was finished. Jesus was dead and buried. The story was closed. We all know this ending. Life is finished and only memories are left. Death is a sure thing.

Early Sunday morning, three women came to the tomb to anoint his body properly, according to custom and the religious law. But much more is happening. The three women come to the tomb and re-open the story. They arrive at the grave sight. The closure is broken. The tomb is unsealed. The women go in -- a huge step. Inside, they are encountered by a world of divine mystery.

Inside the tomb, they did not find Jesus, at least not the Jesus they recognized. There was a young man sitting on the right side, in the position of honor, and he was wearing a white robe. This was the color of robe worn by the resurrected martyrs in the book of Revelation.

The young man speaks and the flow of the story begins to move in the other direction. "Don't be afraid. I know you're looking for Jesus the Nazarene, the One they nailed on the cross. He's been raised up; he's here no longer. You can see for yourselves that the place is empty.

Now--on your way. Tell his disciples and Peter that he is going on ahead of you to Galilee. You'll see him there, exactly as he said."

The Easter story, as told in Mark's gospel, is not exactly a happy ending in which all is resolved. But it is a story re-opened – a mission given a new lease to continue. Jesus will meet you in Galilee where the whole enterprise began. The story is about to start anew. Your story is about to come alive. Tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus is alive. He is present and wearing the clothes of a resurrected martyr.

The unspoken, yet clear question for the women and for the disciples is this, "Are you willing to walk this path and undergo this same transformation?" The last verse of this passage, verse eight, is kind of a downer. In the middle of a festive Easter celebration, it is fraught with ambiguities and uncertainties. It is a very human mixture of faith and fear: faith that brought them to the tomb that morning and the fear that comes with a genuine encounter of the holy that sent them running out of that graveyard as though they'd seen a ghost.

Those faithful women "fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid". The women saw clearly and were terrified.

We know the disciples got the word eventually. Jesus found them, appeared to them, appeared to others, and appeared to Paul much later on the Damascus Road. We know the story from that point to this present day. We know that resurrection was an event in the past. Jesus, who was dead, became alive. He who was crucified as a criminal became King of kings and Lord of lords.

Joseph of Arimathea was a man of good intentions. He was content to put Jesus in a beautiful tomb. He had the body wrapped in fresh linen. The seal of a large stone was placed in front of the tomb. It was the end the story.

But the story was re-opened that first Easter morning. Many people, of good intention, have tried to place the church, the body of Christ, into a beautiful tomb. Call it tradition. Call it expectation. Call it status quo. They want to wrap this Body of Christ in the beautiful fresh linen of liturgy or art or doctrine. And they seal up that tomb. The large stone is place. The story is finished -- under control.

There always seems to be a small group of outsiders, symbolized by women and often literally women, who come early in the morning to see if the story can be re-opened. Time after time, they find the closure broken and the stone rolled away. They find the messenger clothed in martyrs' robes of white. And they hear the message: Jesus is not here. He is risen. He is alive. Go tell the others.

"Christ the Lord is risen today." The new age of God is present now in the middle of a broken and bleeding world, but only when people such as you and me choose to live in its reality. We proclaim God's new age while living in this present age when we worship. We live, for a few moments by faith in that new creation as we sing heavenly praise together.

We proclaim God's new age while living in this present age in our church's ministries. We act with justice by building bridges of relationship. We embrace peace by breaking down barriers of hate, prejudice, and fear.

We proclaim God's new age while living in this present age in our community, by our commitment to each other. We cherish our diversity. I learn to trust the work of the Spirit that is taking place in your life. You learn to trust that work taking place in mine.

We proclaim God's new age in our personal relationships, in commitment to our families and partnerships. We cherish our differences. We learn from each other in the bond of love.

When resurrection becomes a present reality, then we begin to bring God's future into our lives. That's when we'll find justice growing like plants in a rain garden. That's when we'll see peace flowing down like Rocky Mountain streams. That's when the life of God's Spirit emerges within us and between us, then stretches out to embrace the world. It will bless our children and all children forever. I am convinced that God is calling us, calling Crossroads church, to help bring, and help nurture, God's new life in the world.

Jesus waits for us where our journey began. Jesus invites us to re-open the possibilities in our story. Jesus calls us to walk a road that leads to the cross, and beyond it to new life. Sisters and brothers, Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. We are risen. We are risen indeed.

Jesus invites us to enter into communion with him. Because of Easter, Jesus invites us to enter new life and to claim the promise of resurrection for ourselves and for the whole world.

Henri Nouwen writes

Anyone who enters into communion with Jesus will receive the Spirit of truth – the Spirit who frees us from the compulsions and obsessions of our contemporary society, who makes us belong to God's own inner life and allows us to live in the world with open hearts and attentive minds. (from *Walk with Jesus*)

All who hunger to be filled with the living Christ, all who thirst to experience resurrection life, come and be satisfied.