

Where Is Jesus Today?

Matthew 28: 1-10

It was a cold, snowy sunrise on a field outside Moscow in the days of the Soviet empire. A huge crowd, thousands of people, had gathered for the Easter sunrise service. There was a mixture of old faithful Christians, who remembered the pre-Soviet days, and the young and curious. Some in the crowd were suspicious of anything having to do with religion. All these people had gathered as the sun slowly rose and the bitter wind cut through coats and gloves. Members of the secret police stood around the edges of the gathering and looked menacing.

As the speaker moved toward the platform, a guard blocked his route with a threatening gesture. The speaker pleaded, "Just three words -- that's all!" So, the speaker mounted the platform and faced the crowd. There was silence. Then, his voice cut through cold through the wind, "Christ is risen!" Silence, then like a growing tide and like rolling thunder, the words responded, resounded, "Christ is risen indeed!"

Over two millennia, across the world's continents, and in countless languages, we are in union with the faithful. We, too, have gathered once again to bear witness that Christ is risen. Two thousand years after Jesus walked the earth, in an age that is so very different from his, we bring our faith and we also bring our questions. Just what is resurrection? We know about death. It is the same now as then, but resurrection is a strange word, a concept outside our experience.

A second, and related, question is this, "what does resurrection mean for us today -- not abstractly, but in terms of the quality of our lives. There is a third question that might sound strange at first hearing, but one that directly relates to us: "where exactly is Jesus now?"

Easter is all about resurrection, but what is resurrection? Someone described it as Jesus going through death and coming out the other side, rather than coming back to this side. The key to understanding resurrection is actually not to focus on Jesus' body coming back to life, rising up from the grave. A body coming back to life is called *resuscitation*. It would be like Lazarus returning to life or perhaps others who have been clinically dead, yet come back. They were dead and are alive, yet will die again some day.

Resurrection of the risen Jesus was of a different quality. What Jesus became after he died was alive in God's new creation. The risen Jesus who appeared to his disciples, passed through walls, and disappeared suddenly from sight was existing in the new heaven and new earth that God is still in the process of bringing to life.

In many ways, the journey of our lives is symbolized by the tension between Good Friday and Easter Sunday! We live in that tension. Resurrection is the journey of our lives. It is a pilgrimage from death in its many forms to resurrection, being born to new life. The process repeats over and over as we live. The harsh reality of death that we face on Good

Friday in the death of Jesus helps us to embrace the new quality of life that emerges at Easter.

The challenge of Easter is for us to believe that this new dimension and quality of life is the deepest truth of life. What does that mean? To tell you the truth, I'm not really sure exactly what that means. The whole idea is that resurrection and new creation is a mystery. Resurrection speaks the language of *eschatology*. It was thought to be something that would happen to all people at the end of time. The earliest Christians believed that Jesus actually brought this new age with him. Death was not the last word for him. He continued to be with the disciples and in him they experienced the presence of God. Those who follow Jesus today make the same claim – that we experience and believe Jesus is alive and in him experience the presence of God.

Now that third question -- where exactly is Jesus now? What did the angel tell those women at the tomb according to Matthew's Gospel? "He is not here for he has been raised, as he said. 'Come see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.'"

Where is Jesus? He is risen and goes ahead of us on our life's journey. Galilee was where Jesus lived and worked. It was his home. Jesus meets us where we live and walks with us on the journey. Resurrection is the journey of our lives. Our experience and our understanding of the risen Jesus grows and develops throughout our lives. It is shaped by our life experiences and relationships, by our personalities, and by the communities of faith in which we choose to grow. Your experience and your understanding will almost certainly be somewhat different than mine.

Resurrection is more than just something that happened to Jesus 2000 years ago. You and I experience the claim of resurrection on our lives today as we choose to live by the vision of God's new age that Jesus taught and that Jesus brought. As we learn to love others and ourselves as Jesus loved, we find ourselves living in that new age of God – the new creation.

The experience of Jesus living in us and through us is a mystery. It is also an incredibly practical reality. We become mystically connected to God through Christ and, at the same time, we become more and more our true selves! The journey of resurrection is the journey of our lives. It is the process of discovering that wonderful person God created us to be in Jesus' name.

As we celebrate Easter today, let us commit to celebrate Easter each day on our journey. Live with the grace, peace, and transforming presence of the living Christ in you. Indeed, Christ lives through you.