Sermon on Easter Sunday
(During the Covid Pandemic)

So, it’s an obvious conceit on this Easter Sunday morning to say on that first Easter morning, the followers of Jesus were socially isolated, many of them locked in rooms for fear of the Jewish leaders, for fear that they would be next.

But some were out and about, doing what they considered essential, the women in particular, Mary and Mary going to the tomb when they experienced the greatest shock of their lives.

It is in the context of isolation, in the context of exile, far from the sacred places that Jeremiah the prophet dares to speak of hope that scarcely seems imaginable let alone possible.

But make no mistake it is, because Jeremiah is speaking of what God desires, what God wills, what God has revealed to him, that he can use language like “I will build you, and you shall be built…again you shall take the tambourines and go forth in the dance of merrymakers….again you shall plant vineyards.”

What we celebrate today is no mere triumph of human optimism: that brighter days are coming, that spring flowers will/are blooming and that humans will find a way to overcome all their problems.

Certainly we have overcome a boatload of problems in the past even if in our overcoming we inadvertently introduce new challenges and problems!

But what we celebrate today goes far beyond human optimism, however necessary that is in our daily affairs.

What we celebrate today is the deepest dream of humankind, opened up for us in the metaphors of Jeremiah, the dream of Shalom: a deep harmony thrumming away between all peoples and between all peoples and the created order, something that feels almost outside of our imagination and therefore something more akin to the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow then reality.

But we dare to celebrate it because it’s not just our deepest dream but God’s will! Easter is the time we get to shout out, what we want, what I want, God wants even more!

And on Easter morning Mary and Mary learned to their great discombobulation, that what God wants meets our deepest dream God’s desire (show paper) NOW!

When people ask me why are you a Christian, I sometimes don’t answer the question directly but say something like, “Sometimes I’d rather be a Deist. I’d rather just believe in the vague god, the ordinary god that most people in Western civilization seem to have adopted; a little gold cross, show up to church at Christmas because Gramma would expect it, but deep down I know that this God doesn’t really do much, isn’t really present the way my loved ones are present, isn’t really intermingling with my thoughts or my decisions.”

We believe in God but we want to be left alone! But however much I try to fashion a comfortable, keeps-to-a-distance god, I can’t do it and I can’t because God has the gall to bring eternity, to bring Shalom into our present in an through what we celebrate this day.

Jeremiah’s “At that time” becomes in Jesus’ resurrection “At THIS time!”

“At THIS time!” You mean the metaphors aren’t just metaphors. You got it! You mean that Israel will be restored! Yup. You mean that even those who put Israel in that predicament will be blessed and included in this improbable, impossible flowering of creation? Yup. Cf. Cornelius and his household.

You mean, if God shows no partiality that it might mean humans can do the same? Yup. You mean that now we’re given the privilege of not just doing whatever the hell we want but cooperating with “at THIS time,” with partnering towards Shalom? Yup.

You mean that all of this is true, that we’re actually sitting beside the pot of gold while everything else is still unfolding as if the rainbow is a mere chimera? Yup.

That’s the astounding news of “He is Risen!” Last week I quoted from Diarmaid MacCulloch’s magisterial book on the history of Christianity; I do so again as he comments on the Resurrection accounts.

“Historians are never going to make sense of these reports, unless like some of those who first heard them they choose to regard them as simply ludicrous. Nevertheless they can hardly fail to note the extraordinary galvanizing energy of those who spread the story after their experience of Resurrection and Ascension, and they can reconstruct something of the resulting birth of the Christian Church, even if the story can never be more than fragmentary. Whether through some mass delusion, some colossal act of wishful thinking [both of which social psychologists discount as highly improbable, there being no evidence for such categories when it comes to people separated yet claiming the same encounter] or through witness to a power or force beyond any definition known to Western historical analysis, those who had known Jesus in life and had felt the shattering disappointment of his death proclaimed that he lived…that he loved them…and that he was to return to earth from Heaven which he had now entered, to love and save from destruction all who acknowledged him as Lord.”

In other words, the best credible historians can tell us is that “something happened!”

But what communities of faith demonstrate is that this happening has and is opening the world of Shalom, of the pot of Gold NOW!

Now it is not only the Israelites that could and do experience God’s grace in the wilderness, but the goyim, the nations, the Babylonians, the Romans, the Russians and the Canadians.

Now, wherever and however we are! Sick or bored, confused or afraid: He is Risen!

Now, employed or unemployed, whether male or female, gay or straight: He is Risen!

Like the women in the garden, like the first disciples in isolation: on this day He is Risen! Greetings! Go and tell your brothers and sisters: It is God’s will that Shalom isn’t simply a halo of light rimming the world but always just outside sight; God’s impartiality is NOW!

As you put your faith there, as you begin to live that, there you will see me!