

Easter Sunday with Amy

Good morning church. Happy Easter! Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed!)

What do we mean when we say this? What exactly are we saying as Christian people, as disciples of Jesus, when we proclaim the truth of Easter to one another this way? I think we are speaking about the kind of people we want to be. One person claims "Christ is risen," meaning, "I am someone who is trying to live presently holding the reality of the realm of the final things in the midst of an unfolding history."

Another responds, "He is risen, indeed!" meaning "Me, too! I am with you. Let's take the crucified off the cross together because we acknowledge and recognise that death has been defeated! Hallelujah!"

We are affirming to one another that we seek to live the kind of transformed lives that allow us to hold the paradox of death bringing new life. We demonstrate our desire and aim to see the world as it can be and as it is promised to be, while never looking away from what is. In doing so, we are moved to align with the crucified and to, with supreme tenderness, remove them from the cross and bear faithful witness to their living and triumph over suffering and humiliation.

One of the last things I said in my reflection yesterday was: "Love sings the last note." I believe this to be the truth of this Universe with all of my heart. And while I do not imagine that we can ever be clever enough, good enough, wise enough, ambitious enough to do it on our own; I do believe that by our own transformation from this gospel of good news that we have heard today--in which Jesus vanquishes death--we are invited to join in singing Love's chorus by bearing witness to where we see resurrection and by enacting resurrection in our own spaces. As it is said by our Jewish siblings in the Pirkei Avot or Ethics of the Fathers, "It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task, but neither are you free to absolve yourself from it." (Ethics of the Fathers, 2:21) God will never abandon us to the work of the world, but asks that we engage with the hope and faithful understanding of heaven on earth.

In today's scripture, Jesus, who was Love Incarnate, was found there outside the tomb by Mary. And there, Mary, who wept for the one whom she loved so deeply and had followed so devotedly, mistook that One for the gardener. That always amuses me. That the Son of God could be overlooked as "the help" before being recognised. There are, I think, layers of poignancy in that. When we think of who it is bent over in the hot fields to the south of us, picking the delightful fruits that we might place upon our Easter waffles and pancakes, do we imagine that their sweat-soaked brown brows might require a second glance to see a glimpse of the risen Christ? How do the exploited ever get taken off the cross if we cannot see in them the image of our beloved Jesus?

Jesus as the gardener does let us not forget that just a few days before his crucifixion, he said, "Unless a seed falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12:24) There in the garden, Jesus, back from the dead, is not only mistaken for but becomes now the gardener...the gardener of the resurrection, the nurturer of hope. The seed of Divinity and Love's Power sewn, planted, and resurrected in the garden of the tomb. Our everlasting hope. Mercy is the tender of our spirits.

Church, I am sure you have heard many Easter reflections that proclaim Hope. I want you all to consider that "Hope is a do-word." It requires that we do something. We step out on faith that God has defeated death, and that gives us the tenacity to do acts of moral courage during a time of deep uncertainty when our instinct might be just to retreat... We keep living, we risk vulnerability, and we agitate to enact justice even when it costs. This is doing hope. After these years of pandemic, we have come to know about faith that costs. Faith that must endure despite challenge, pain, loneliness and death. So much death. For many, the hope was that we would not be facing a sixth wave of covid and having to weigh the pros and cons of Easter out of the sanctuary vs coming to worship with friends and family. But here we find ourselves. I trust that you have made the decision that best suits both your health and your need to connect with others. Like the two years prior, still some of us feel like Easter exiles. And there are those for whom this Easter celebration might feel dampened or muted because of the circumstances. Please remember, Church, we are not the first of our lineage. Adam and Eve started it off, and our whole scripture just keeps on telling us of those spiritual ancestors who were exiled! But saying so, I do remind you that hope is a do-word. That even in the midst of exile, we do hope by continuing to visualize and pray that we will be able to embrace freely and worship without calculations of safety. That peace will reign. That a new heaven and a new earth will be made in the shape of the Most Merciful One. Our hope is that the things of the past will be lifted from our psyche as a source of anxiety and pain. We do hope by continuing to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God. We become the seeds of resurrection this way. We sing Love's chorus this way.

And as we "do hope", I wonder too if we can simultaneously reflect upon and claim an identity as exiles? I quote the great Ellen Davis on this very query written long before coronavirus ever kept us from church: "What might it mean for us to claim our identity as exiles? While striving for superficial forms of community will leave us lonely and undisciplined, a full recognition that we are in some way marginalised, alienated, or reeling from loss can propel us into the real community called "church"."

Church, I hope we have learned during this time that church is so much more than a place or a building. As wonderful as it is for those who are here to be here again and as much as we long for you at home to be here with us, we know there is more. I think it is us, followers of the Anointed Gardener, seeking to become and enact what Dr King called the beloved community. A people who thirsts and hungers to enact the joy of the resurrection amongst all people who feel estranged from it... who feel endlessly bound to the suffering of the cross and all the violence it represents. As we share in God's holiness, we may recognize one another as gifts of grace, and discover in the light of this grace that we have finally found our true home.

Let us all be sustained by the God made known in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; and to believe that “unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word”

Gardener Jesus, stay with us. We will try not to cling to you but walk confidently knowing you are among us. Make us holy through your unbound Spirit, make us your resurrected church, for we know that all things come to being through you. Life itself has come into being through you, and it is our life, the light of all people. This light shines radiantly for us this Easter day, and we see it; we proclaim it was not overcome by humiliation, suffering, nor death.

Love sings the final note. Forever. And we join in its triumphant harmony. Hallelujah!

Amen