

## Chris is Risen Indeed

*A sermon by the Rev. Daniel Simons  
at St. Paul's on the Green, Norwalk, CT*

EASTER DAY: APRIL 9, 2023

ACTS 10:34-43 | COLOSSIANS 3:1-4 | MATTHEW 28:1-10

Christ is risen *indeed!* That “indeed” is this exclamation point at the end of the sentence. It is the core proclamation of the church from its earliest days. It's big. It's bold. It's daring, and it's very intentional.

Each year we get a different version of the resurrection. This year, it's year 'A,' so it's Matthew. Matthew's version is the splashiest of them all - it's got angels with lightning faces and white robes that scare the guards to death. It's got lightning... And yet, even in Matthew's version, there is just an empty tomb. And their first experience is one of the absence of what they expected, and then the presence of what they didn't expect. And that just keeps going. This experience of Jesus - we know the sound and the taste and the touch of that voice and that message and that being - there it is. But it's not what we expected and it's not where we expected. Now what? That way of the new and the unfolding experience was part of their experience from the earliest days until now. It still is happening.

And so today, especially today, as we ponder resurrection: what it is, what it means. It is something we cannot prove, and yet it is something we do experience, and I would say maybe even can learn to proclaim with our lives. Indeed.

So interestingly, the Gospels spend very little time describing the resurrection - usually it's only a couple of verses, and then they're on to the next thing. And they spend even less time trying to prove it. They're far more interested in talking about what resurrection produces: What happens next? What does it mean for their own lives? Where do we go from here?

And there's this wonderful, coded directive that shows up in the angel's voice, and then in Jesus' voice in this reading, this Matthew reading. The angel says: “He has gone ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.” And I say it's coded because Galilee wasn't just describing a geographical place like New Jersey. Galilee was that place that was not Jerusalem - it was as far away from Jerusalem, from what mattered, as you could get. It was the hinterland; it was the country bumpkins. It was the place where people that had *that* accent, that had *those* politics, and that had that kind of education. It was there. And in their cases, it was also where they were from - it was home. So the code when Galilee is mentioned is always: “Go back home. Go where you started from. That's where you're going to see, but in a new way.”

And when the disciples go there... (So this is the reading/the verses that come next after what we read. It's gonna take all the way until June and Trinity Sunday till we get there with a lot of John in between. We'll get there, just after Pentecost.) Jesus meets them in Galilee. He shows up and the only thing he has to say to them before he is off the scene is “Go and teach others what I have taught you.”

And when you really got to break it down and say, well, what did he teach? It's not a set of doctrines - it's a series of practices. They're practices that change everything about how daily life looks and how it works for us when we practice it. So much so that, like death and rebirth, it's hard to see sometimes, and yet it's very, very real.

So, "What are those practices that make resurrection real?" you might ask? Well, we say them every Sunday: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done." That's one: surrender. "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." That's two: forgiveness. Surrender and forgiveness - that's kind of it.

Surrender our insistence of what life should be like. Every day. Let this letting go of our planned life be the finding of the life that God has for us, day by day. It's not sexy - it is transformative. It changes everything. It is the way of Jesus - that is the way of the cross. That is none other than the way of life and peace. And then forgive and be forgiven, as God has already forgiven you. There's the formula - just that. That is "The way of the cross, that is none other than the way of life and peace," as the ancient collect says.

When we were walking the Stations of the Cross that circle the church, Gwyneth Leech's stations (the extraordinary art that brings the current present world that we live in into this biblical story), we got around to Station 7 when Jesus is strung up on the cross. And the poetry that goes with these stations is arresting as well, and it caught my attention in a new way. I want you to hear it:

*The dark nails pierce him and the sky turns black,  
And love is firmly fastened onto loss.  
But here a pure change happens. On this tree  
Loss becomes gain, death opens into birth.  
Here wounding heals and fastening makes free  
Earth breathes in heaven. heaven roots in earth.  
And here we see the length, the breadth, the height,  
Where love and hatred meet and love stays true.  
Where sin meets grace and darkness turns to light.  
We see what love can bear and be and do.  
And here our savior calls us to his side  
His love is free, his arms are open wide.*

The poet is talking about crucifixion, but at the same time, resurrection - not three days from now but right in the middle of it. Both are happening.

And that's where I say we can identify - we have all been through it. We have all had those experiences of our lives. In the 12-step program, it's when that bottom drops out. It's when we hit the bottom that suddenly something opens up, and not until then, where that pure change happens. Where "loss becomes gain, death opens into birth, and where we see what love can bear and be and do."

This is where Resurrection happens - not in theory, but in deed, in our deeds, in our lives. In fact, I would say if there's any positive proof of the Resurrection, it's just there: when our backs are up against the wall, when we need it most, which sometimes is just in the boring daily doing of our lives, but it's any time that we say "yes." Surrender. Where we say yes,

and forgive, or be forgiven. That is the way of Jesus. That is the way of the cross that truly triumphs over death in its fearless freedom.

Paul is talking about this in the epistle this morning. He says, "You are already dead. That's behind. As Christ is revealed, so you are revealed." In those moments of that loss and finding - that's where it's happening. Which means always and everywhere, so that God in every fiber and photon of the universe is inviting us now to ponder and explore with every moment of the rest of our lives this resurrection living. What this is and means to look for that risen-ness in our deeds, in those Galilee places, especially in that collision between the unexpected and the new: "Where love and hatred meet and love stays true. Where sin meets grace and darkness turns to light."

That way of surrender, forgiveness, is a wonderful way to walk. Jesus says, "The yoke is easy. The burden is light." How did we not see that? And why don't we live it? And we can.

So, rise up Saints - it's a new day. We are ever made new people in it, and God is doing a new thing in our midst.

Give it to me big! Alleluia! Christ is risen!

*[Crowd replies]* The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Give it to me bigger! Alleluia! Christ is risen!

*[Crowd replies]* Alleluia! The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Okay, the third time's the charm. Your answer is "The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!" Alleluia! Christ is risen!

*[Crowd replies]* The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia! *[Laughter]*

Amen. Amen.