

Easter Day C  
Isaiah 65:17-25

April 4, 2010  
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

St. Andrew's Church  
Acts 10:34-43

The Rev. Susan Russell  
Luke 24:1-12

Alleluia, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia! Blessings to all on this joyful day of Our Lord's Resurrection. May your hearts be lifted up.

Hearing the choir sing that lovely introit to begin worship and then watching them process in and out, and back in again, has made me think of a story I heard some years ago which was reported to me as absolutely true.

It occurred in a Presbyterian church in Pittsburgh on the occasion of a major Sunday. I think it was Easter. The church was full of worshippers. The choir had many singers and the church was quite large, with a long aisle down which the choir began its procession, joyfully singing the entrance hymn to the strains of the mighty organ.

About midway down the aisle one of the sopranos, who was wearing her best stiletto heels, stepped into a heating grate in the floor and quickly discovered that her heel was caught. Knowing that the show must go on, she deftly stepped out of the shoe and continued walking on one shoe and one tippie toe.

A tenor a few rows back saw what had happened and so when he reached the grate he stooped down with one fluid motion and picked up the shoe. But the grate came with it...and the bass behind him fell into the hole in the floor. So much for the pageantry of formal processions.

My challenge today will be to make the choir laugh at that all three times that they will hear it this morning.

But my hope is that we all might walk in the joy of this Easter Day without a misstep, without doing as the poor bass did, falling into a hole.

The angels the women find in the tomb warn of one way we might go wrong as we come this morning, seeking a greater understanding of what happened on that morning. The angels ask the women, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."

It's a great question – why do you look for the living among the dead? Of course the women were sure he was dead. They had come to embalm his body. The angels were not really hoping for an answer, rather it was their way of delivering the good news, of telling the women that the tomb was now empty and that he was not dead but alive. He wasn't there anymore. Why would they look for him in a place of death?

And it's an apt question for us. Unless we are able to receive this good news for ourselves and believe that there is new life for us in this resurrection, the angels' joyful report may remain for us in a dead place within, and we may take an Easter tumble through the hole in the floor.

We do not experience the same resurrection Jesus experienced. We never will, though eternal life is promised to us after this life.

Jesus died once, for all, and was raised from death once, for all. And whether we can suspend our human need to prove scientifically that something like this did happen, or not, and whether we can come to accept it just as it is told to us in the gospel, this is really not the point.

The point is that for the Creator of the universe all things are possible and we need only to see that there is beautiful truth at the center of this action of God's love' regardless of how the events unfolded.

God has woven hints of resurrection into our everyday living in order to reveal that truth to us, so that we may learn what it feels like to be full of life again and to be able to trust in resurrection.

So, since we are called to look for Jesus in our lives, why not look for the living Christ in places that are new and open and hopeful instead of looking in our old dead places? "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

Why look for newness of life by looking back at the old ways, the old habits?

Why dwell on old grudges, when reaching out in love might affect a reconciliation and a new relationship?

Why return again and again to the disappointments and the humiliations of the past, viewing them as the end of opportunity, instead of taking a lesson from them and moving on?

Why guard the closed up places in our hearts so fiercely when to do so is to limit what we may become?

Why allow guilt to take us over when forgiveness is possible?

Why resist the desire of God to open our hearts to new life?

We all have dead places in us and we will not find the living Christ by remaining in them as though we were stuck there.

I suppose its human nature to look back. Its human nature to hold on to those things that have given us enjoyment and satisfaction in the past in the hope of repeating them. Its human nature to savor memories of better times, to look backward at something we know for support.

But looking back is too much wrapped up in the fear of losing what we once had, or the vain hope of being able to change it. Fear plays on the illusion that we can repeat what once was anyway. And fear is the biggest hole in the floor there is. Once we fall through that it's the very devil crawling out again.

Fear keeps us from seeing what is new and healing and full of life. So it may be best to resist our human nature on this. And to remember that there is no fear in the presence of the living Christ.

The symbol of Holy Week is the cross, where our Lord gave up life for us. But he does not stay on the cross, nor should we.

The symbol of this Easter Day is the empty tomb. Its entrance is open. Death is no more to be found there. "He is not here. He has risen." Jesus is out in the world among those who are in pain, living through it with them. That's where the living Christ is to be found.

God is in the business of breathing life into dust and into dry bones and into our stony hearts. God redeems our pain and suffering by going through it with us, as Jesus did, and by guiding us to put the pieces of our lives together again in a new and fruitful way.

So I urge you this Easter to build new habits of openness to the Easter message of resurrection. Worship God,  
be in community here at St. Andrew's or wherever you are at home,  
learn Holy Scripture,  
serve the poor and the sick.

Walk on and step carefully over the heating grates. Leave the stilettos at home.  
Seek the living Christ among the living.  
Thanks be to God.

Soli Deo Gloria