

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Today is a day of celebration. Today is the day of Resurrection. Today is the day all creation lets out its collective breath. Today is the day Christ has defeated sin and death. Today is the day we've hoped for – let us shout, “Alleluia!” to the Lord.

On this day the sun shines brighter, as the darkness of death has been vanquished. On this day our steps are lighter as we shrug off the gloom and weight of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. This is the day of triumph, and I am glad you are here to celebrate this day with us.

For those who don't know, there's a tradition here at Saint Luke's where the kids, as they come back into church from Sunday school, ask the priest a question. It's not exactly a “Stump the Rector” kind of thing, but I need to be ready for anything, and I need to be fairly quick-thinking. The question last week was, “What is your favorite resurrection story?” I actually have two of them, and we get to hear them both this year.

The first is from the Gospel of Mark, which we heard earlier this morning at the Easter Vigil. The women go to the tomb only to find an angel who tells them 1) Don't be afraid (because that's what angels do); 2) Jesus has been raised; and, 3) Go tell his disciples. And what do the women do? They run away and say nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. The end.

It's such an odd and unsatisfying ending to Mark's gospel that later writers added not one but ***TWO*** different endings in an effort to make it more appealing. But I like the original ending. Among other things, Mark is known for things happening “Immediately.” Immediately the Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness. Immediately Simon and Andrew left their nets to follow Jesus. Immediately the Pharisees conspired with the Herodians as to how to destroy him. Mark uses immediately as often as all the other gospels combined. Because of that, it becomes easy to see Mark as a gospel of action. But when it comes to today, we are left hanging. Why didn't the women immediately go and tell the disciples about the resurrection?

My take on this is that this is Mark's way of saying it's no longer about the characters in his gospel story, it's now about us. It's now about those reading the story. It's now about you.

Today the tomb is empty. Today we meet an angel who tells us that Jesus has been raised, he is not here. Today we are told to go tell people about the Resurrection, the fulfilled promise, and the news that sin and death have been defeated. Today we are given the same choice the women were given: we can run away from here and say nothing to anyone because we are afraid, or we can choose to tell people what we have seen and experienced here today.

If we run away, the story ends with us. If we tell people, the story continues. And that's why this is one of my favorite resurrection stories – because in a story of resurrection and new life, I can't let the story die with me.

My other favorite story is the one we just heard. Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb alone, finds it empty, goes and tells Peter and (traditionally) John, has an encounter with “the gardener,” and then realizes that the gardener is really the resurrected Christ.

There are some bits of humor here – how does she think she can carry a corpse by herself, and where is she going to put it? – but it's really a story about how we see.

The first question everyone always asks is, “Why didn't Mary know it was Jesus?” The answer is because resurrection fundamentally changed the human Jesus. He was no longer fully human/fully divine, he was now fully divine. He went from being Jesus to being Christ. Mary was not yet used to seeing him this way. Mary didn't realize who he was until she wasn't looking at him and heard his voice. Sometimes our eyes blind us from seeing what's really there.

How many times have we judged people based on what we see – hair styles, skin color, what they drive, what they wear, etc.?

Sometime during my teenage years, so maybe 45 years ago or so, I used to ride a Greyhound Bus from Seattle to various points in eastern Washington. I met some interesting people during those trips, most of whom I've forgotten; but one person stands out in my memory.

I think my mom dropped me off at the station and I got on the bus and found a seat, hoping, as you do, that nobody would sit next to me. About one minute before departure, I saw her. She was overweight, disheveled, was struggling with one-too-many bags, and had long hair that looked like she hadn't washed it in a week or more. And she sat down right next to me. I promptly turned toward the window and pretended to fall asleep.

Unfortunately I couldn't pretend for the whole trip, so halfway through I "woke up." At which point she told me she had saved half of her chocolate bar to share with me (because Greyhound doesn't serve snacks), and we began to have a really good conversation which included me explaining the appeal of Pac-Man to her. When we reached our common destination, I sprung for a couple games of Pac-Man in the lobby and then we went our separate ways. It wasn't until I stopped looking at her with my eyes and began seeing her by getting to know her that I could see her for who she was - a very nice, thoughtful, and compassionate person.

Unless we take the time to hear someone, we just might see them for who we think they are, not who they really are. This is why this resurrection story is one of my favorites - because it reminds me, us, to see people with more than our eyes.

On this day of Resurrection, may you be filled with joy and amazement. May you hear the angel say, "Go and tell." May you not run away in fear but go with purpose and excitement at sharing this good news. May you see how Christ can change people. May you learn to see with more than your eyes.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Today is Easter. May you not be afraid.

Amen.