



Easter Day, Year C – April 4, 2010

John 20, 1-18

A Homily preached by the Rev'd Tara Livingston

I have seen the Lord, Mary declares to the disciples. I have seen the Lord, she said, on that day of resurrection long ago. And today, after 50 days of Lent, we hear for the first time, Christ is Risen, the Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Note the word "is". We do not declare, Christ was Risen One thousand, nine hundred and seventy seven years ago, Alleluia. No. It is today, it is here, and it is now.

He is here. He is alive and around us and within us.

Any child of the Western World, of modern society, will have questions about that assertion and there's no shame in that. God, in God's infinite wisdom, gave us this wonderful brain and we are not required to check it at the door when we enter a sacred space – we are meant to use it.

Some will say that the resurrection is the last obstacle to a truly modern Christian faith; that everything else can be explained in some fashion except for the resurrection.

In the year 1609 Galileo Galilei – at the University of Pisa – pointed a spyglass at the stars and modern scientific inquiry was born. Ever since then the underlying premise of modern thought is that truth is observable and only what is observable is truth.

Therefore if it cannot be observed, or studied or analyzed it cannot be truth.

Biblical scholarship has been influenced by this truth seeking – archaeology, biblical literary criticism. We have gained a lot from these endeavours as they have provided insights and provided a depth, a clarity, and new understanding of the life and times of Jesus.

And then there is the resurrection. We are no closer to be able to conclusively say that Jesus rose from the dead and this is where many biblical scholars stumble.

On Thursday evening we heard the choir sing a song that asks "Were you there when they crucified my Lord". Well, we weren't but we know that many were – even non Christian writers like Josephus and Celsus chronicle this event. But when the spiritual asks "were you there when God raised him from the tomb" the answer is and must be, no. No one was there in the darkness of the tomb – on that morning – behind the stone.

Fundamentally you cannot escape this mystery that lies at the core of our faith

The Christian faith is not a conclusion.

It is a way of life – a way of being alive in the risen Lord.

St. Augustine said it very bluntly back in the 4th century – "If you think you understand it – then it isn't from God."

Mary came in darkness to the tomb to find the stone rolled away. She ran to tell her friends and after they had confirmed that it was indeed empty and had left, Mary stayed and wept. She wept at more than just this final indignation of the body being gone, rather she wept at all of the events that lead up to that moment. She wept at the loss of their shepherd, their leader and her friend. The culmination of all of the loss streamed out of her in tears that came from the depth of her grief. The hole in her soul left by the death of her companion was now compounded by the loss of his body, the last tangible, touchable proof that it had not been all a dream.

And then, a voice asks, why do you weep? She weeps because she feels completely and utterly alone! Who are you looking for? She is looking for her friend, her companion, who has been taken from her not once, but twice!

And then, "Mary". "Mary". The sweetest sound that we ever hear is the sound of our own name being spoken by someone we love. "Mary", says Jesus, and she explodes with relief, "Rabbouni!"

This is the resurrection. It is in that moment, the moment that took place so long ago, that we understand today, in the present, in 2010. In the here and now we can all listen for Jesus to speak our name. In the here and now, we can look around us and see the face of Jesus in one another. We, like Mary, may not recognize him at first but he is there, he is always there. This is the sign of the resurrection. "Mary". Death, even death on a cross, cannot separate us from the love of God as revealed in Christ. Just as he was present to Mary in the garden outside of an empty tomb, Christ is present to us today.

Christ is risen, Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

In a few minutes we will celebrate the Eucharist where we follow Jesus

commandment to remember him. It is not to understand – it is to experience.

When we take the bread and the wine, do we do it just because he said Do this?

This is only part of it. We do it as an action that matches the essence of our faith – we are saying, Jesus, I receive you into the whole of my being. I welcome you into the whole of my being.

The untouchable Christ is not unknowable. The resurrected Christ is not a character in an ancient story. The same Christ that whispered Mary's name long ago, whispers to each of us, here in the present time. It is in those whispers, in our names spoken with more love than we can bear, that we are raised to new life. It is when we truly open ourselves up to receiving Christ into our whole beings that we are able to go and be the light of the world in the world outside of these doors. It is in the joy of the resurrection that we are strengthened to take up Christ's message to us to live a new life.

In the power of the risen Christ we are called to

Live life thankfully

Live life forgivingly

Live life mercifully

Live life hopefully

When we listen for the voice of God, we live in gratitude for all we have been given. When we experience the word of God we can forgive those trespasses that have been made against us and work at forgiving ourselves. When we receive Christ into our very being, we can live mercifully showing compassion to those around us. And when we live in the joy of the resurrection we can, above all, live in hope, hope for this life and the life to come.

We are asked on this glorious day of the resurrection to stand with Christ in his risen life and to be confident that, just as he sought out Mary and whispered her name on that first Easter, he seeks us out and calls us. All we have to do listen and to be confident in what we cannot see, cannot touch but as Christians can certainly feel and know.

And as we stand at the opening of the empty tomb pray that God's life might breathe life into this life of yours. He is risen, Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia.