

St. Paul's Church, Healdsburg  
The Rev. Sally Hanes Hubbell  
Easter Sunday  
April 5, 2015

Texts: Isaiah 25:6-9; Ps. 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Mark 16:1-8

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

What is there not to be happy about on Easter Sunday? We have family visiting, Easter egg hunts, lots of good food to eat. Easter is such a joyful occasion. But it isn't a *simply* joyful occasion. A lot goes into getting to today – into getting to this point of joy. Specifically, Lent is what gets us here. In the Episcopal Church and in many other Christian Traditions, the season of Lent and Holy Week is what we must go through to get to Easter.

For the past seven weeks of Lent, we've been trudging through the most difficult passages of the Bible (all the downer scripture). My guess is that some of you missed out on Lent, so I'm just going to do little re-cap. We've been slogging through the wilderness with Moses and the Israelites, as they complain about the hardships of life on the road. They even start thinking, we should just turn around and head back Egypt – the food was so much better back there and life wasn't as hard as this constant wandering, even if we were slaves. We were also dealing with Jesus' most difficult sayings. Jesus himself has to go on a fast in the desert for 40 days, and not surprisingly he's really cranky and argumentative when that's over and he rejoins his companions. He gets mad at Peter and calls him "Satan" and denies even knowing his own mother. Lent is not fun for anyone! It's no wonder there are more of you here this Sunday than were around last week!

Now it's Easter. We've all finally arrived in the Promised Land, and everyone is feasting. Our reading from the prophet Isaiah sums it up beautifully:

"On this mountain (St. Paul's Church in Healdsburg) the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples (that's the burial shroud), the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth."

What is meant there by "the disgrace of his people he will take away," is that the people of God will never again be losers. From now on you'll have a home, a people to call our own and purpose for living. It's all going to be all right. In Easter, we all arrive in the Promised Land. I believe that to be true with all my heart, but it isn't a simple truth. I doubt that true joy is ever simple.

The accounts of the resurrection in each of the four Gospels differ somewhat. The gist of each one is the same: the tomb is empty. But the details surrounding the story vary a bit. This year we are reading primarily from the Gospel of Mark, which is both the earliest Gospel written and the briefest. There is very little fluff in Mark's telling of things. The style is plain and abrupt –which is evident in our passage this morning.

Mary Magdalene and the other women go to the graveyard to anoint Jesus' body, and they are asking themselves, who will roll away the stone from the tomb? But when they arrive, they see the stone has already been rolled away. According to Mark's Gospel, Mary was one of those who on Good Friday laid Jesus' body in the tomb, so she would have had a clear idea in her mind of what she would find when she went back this day to anoint his body. She knew where he had been placed, how his body looked wrapped in a linen cloth, in the burial shroud. Mary knew what to expect.

But that isn't what she found. Seeing the stone rolled back, the women entered the tomb, and Jesus wasn't there. Instead, apparently waiting for them, is a "young man" dressed in white who tells them that Jesus has been raised, and to go tell the other disciples that everything is taking place just as Jesus said it would.

The reaction of the women is interesting in Mark's account of things. "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." They fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them. That isn't what we think of as the usual Easter scene for Jesus' followers. There is nothing lighthearted or even happy about this first Easter.

This ending of Mark's Gospel is shocking. There is a lot of debate among Biblical scholars about the original ending of this Gospel, but most agree this is probably it. It ends here with the women running away in terror and amazement, telling no one what they had seen because they were afraid.

Mark's account leaves us hanging – he doesn't tie up the story of the resurrection in a nice neat narrative. And because of that, I find it very convincing. I believe it's true to how human beings work – true to how we think and feel, and most of all true to how we recognize miracles.

You see a real miracle, or anything with implications as far reaching as the resurrection of Jesus, this man whom Mary and the others believed to be the messiah of Israel, this man whom they had come to see as the true presence of God among them, this man whom Mary and the others had come to love with a depth they'd never before thought possible – any miracle so great and life changing as the resurrection of this man from the dead, has to be taken in slowly. It has to be digested bit by bit. Just think of how long it takes to adjust to the miracle of becoming parents -- nine months, for starters, and then a couple of decades after that!

Of course Mary and the others aren't going to understand what's happening when they first see that the tomb is empty, and of course they are going to be amazed and even terrified when the angelic figure speaks with them. Actually in all four of the Gospel accounts, the immediate reaction of all of the disciples is fear. They lock themselves away in the upper room and are too afraid to open the door when Jesus first comes to them. All of Jesus' followers have to go through a period of letting this miracle sink in, and adjusting to the implications of it in and for their lives.

You see they have to make their own journey into the Promised Land. They have to make the decision to leave the slavery of fear behind them, just as the Israelites did. They all have to figure out that Isaiah's promise of feasting and the

banishment of death and disgrace is meant for them. Which of course they will figure out – and so one day will you and I. Easter is about arriving in the Promised Land, but it isn't a straightforward or an easy route – for the Israelites, for Mary and the disciples, or for us.

Go easy on yourself if the miracle of the resurrection is taking some time to get used to. That's only natural, because it's such a big deal.

I want to end by reading you a poem that was written one thousand years ago by a man known as Symeon the New Theologian. I like it because it tells us just how big a deal the life and resurrection of Jesus is for each and every one of us. It reminds us that it's hard to be a bystander of the resurrection because it must happen within us.

*We awaken in Christ's body as Christ awakens our bodies, and my poor hand is Christ, He enters my foot, and is infinitely me.*

*I move my hand, and wonderfully my hand becomes Christ, becomes all of Him (for God is indivisibly whole, seamless in His Godhood).*

*I move my foot, and at once He appears like a flash of lightning. Do my words seem blasphemous? — Then open your heart to Him*

*and let yourself receive the one who is opening to you so deeply. For if we genuinely love Him, we wake up inside Christ's body*

*where all our body, all over, every most hidden part of it, is realized in joy as Him, and He makes us, utterly, real,*

*and everything that is hurt, everything that seemed to us dark, harsh, shameful, maimed, ugly, irreparably damaged, is in Him transformed*

*and recognized as whole, as lovely, and radiant in His light he awakens as the Beloved in every last part of our body.*

We awaken in Christ's body by Symeon the New Theologian.