

Easter Day

Mk 16.1-8

April 12, 2009

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I suppose practically everybody in the whole world knows that local boy Stephen Colbert is a famous man. Our own parishioner, Nancy Wise taught him at Porter-Gaud years ago, and she claims to be the one to have suggested the new pronunciation of his name. Apparently, all his siblings pronounce the family name *Colbert*.

But just on the off chance some of you haven't heard of him, he is the anchor of a mock political commentary show on the Comedy Central network entitled *The Colbert Report*. And one of Mr. Colbert's trademark words is *truthiness*. That is to say, he is not necessarily a fact checker. If he likes the sound of something, if it has the air of "truthiness" about it, then that is good enough. It doesn't have to be actually true.

Drawing on that as a rhetorical device, I read a comment recently about a famous religious leader's Easter message. The commentator said that the sermon had an air of "resurrection-ness" about it. Sort of like "truthiness"... the facts aren't so important... just how the words inspire us, how they make us feel.

Last year, during the Lenten Season, a very fine rabbi came to Church of the Holy Communion to speak to us about the Traditions of Passover. During his talk, he said something to the effect that, for him, it didn't matter if the Exodus actually happened, it was the metaphor, the story... the culture and truths that inspired a people for thousands of years... That's what mattered.

But I am here to proclaim to you this morning that we are not about "truthiness" nor "resurrection-ness". And while the flowers of spring and singing birds and colored eggs and girls in new dress are all fine things, they are woefully insufficient cause for us to gather this morning.

The startling and outrageous truth is that God, in the person of Jesus Christ, became a flesh and blood human being. That he was tortured and killed cruelly, and that after spending three days dead in the cold dark tomb... as dead as anyone has ever been... he was raised to new life, with his flesh and bones, in a new and glorious Body. And because Jesus has conquered death in the flesh, death shall never have the final word over you and me.

Regardless of what brought you here this morning, my job is to make sure that you have not left without hearing that truth. And to furthermore convince you of the blessed hope that each of you has in Christ.

The Roman Catholic theologian Dr. Peter Kreeft says that when it comes to resurrection, we must be visual learners.

It is, he tells us, much easier to argue with an idea than with an image. That is why the medium of television is so influential. We will believe the evidence of our eyes. It is one thing to read about an airplane flying into a building. It is altogether different when it happened before our eyes.

When tragedy strikes anywhere in the world, television or the internet take us front and center...

Somalian Pirates on the High Seas...

Hostages...

Terrorists attacks...

The suffering and brutality of war...

We don't miss a thing.

We believe it... because we see it.

Blessed St. Thomas is often maligned for his doubts... we will hear all about that next Sunday...(and by the way, rumor has it that it will be a substantial crowd next week. I'd recommend coming early!)

Thomas may have seemed a bit slow on the uptake...

but it is very clear from the record of the Gospel that no matter what Jesus *said*... no matter how often he told His followers that He would rise... nobody believed that after Good Friday they would ever see him alive again.

It was simply too preposterous

Images *are* everything. And the horrific, indelible image in their minds was a dead cold Jesus being taken down from the cross.

That image had burned itself into their very souls, and it was very difficult for anything to replace it.

Those women that we read about in the Gospel of Mark this morning... the two Marys and Salome... they were expecting a dead Jesus and a sealed tomb. They certainly were not expecting an open, empty grave.

In John's Gospel we read that Mary Magdalene, even with Jesus standing before her, thought he must have been the gardener...

The two men on the road to Emmaus walked with him for hours without having a clue...

And the disciples in the upper room were so startled that they thought they must be seeing things... a ghost or an apparition...

But when he spoke their name... When he fed them breakfast... When he broke the Eucharistic bread... When he showed them his wounds... they were completely transformed. Like men locked in caves for decades, their eyes slowly adjusted to the majesty of his brilliance.

You see, that's why the Church invites us to walk with Jesus every step of the way during Holy Week. To move from Palm Sunday to Easter with nothing in between gives us the impression that sorrow is merely replaced by Joy. Like flipping a switch. Grief one instant. Joy the next.

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, the great Orthodox theologian reminds us that the Church does not teach that the resurrection replaced grief. Rather, the resurrection has *transformed* grief.

Some of us come to this Easter Day with the wounds of death still very fresh in our hearts. We would be ill-served if we were led to believe that our faith was insufficient simply because we are still grieving.

But Jesus comes to us Risen, and yet wounded. And he invites us into the transfiguring glory of the resurrected life... Even as we also share the wounds of our common humanity.

That is something that each of those eye-witnesses had to learn for himself.

Truly, when they saw their Lord Risen, standing before them... when the reality of that had finally reached the center of their being... they were filled with indescribable joy.

...A Joy that sustained them through humiliation, and rejection; suffering and imprisonment; exile and martyrdom.

They were willing to suffer the loss of all things... in order that they might cling fast to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, Crucified, yet gloriously risen.

And those eye witnesses are our epistles...they are our living reporters...

They, and the countless saints and martyrs through the centuries offer formidable testimony to the Resurrection.

But do you know what? We don't simply have to take their word for it. For we two are called, right now, to participate in Resurrection Life.

In this morning's epistle, St. Paul tells us, *You have been raised with Christ. Your lives are HID in Christ.*

Keep in mind that this passage is part of very early Baptismal instruction. And keep in mind that in the early church, practically all baptisms were done at Easter. So for a very long time, people have been hearing this passage read to them when they were fresh out of the font. Baptized just a few hours... still wet behind the ears...

And what St Paul is insisting is that the essential part of who we are and who we are called to be is *already* hidden in the mystery of Christ. When we were baptized and *marked as Christ's own forever*, the essential "us" was taken into the heart of Christ. And in his heart we are held and loved and protected... even...sometimes... from ourselves. We may sometimes give up on Christ, but he will never give up on us. And the resurrection that he began in us which is, for the moment hidden, will in the fullness of time be gloriously manifest.

*Christ being raised from the dead can never die again. Death no long hath dominion over him.*

*So consider yourselves also dead unto sin... and alive unto God through Jesus Christ.*

*Alleluia! Christ is Risen!*

*Amen+++*