

“HE IS RISEN!”

Matthew 28:1-10 Easter Sunday April 12, 2020

It's true! It's all true. Christ is Risen!

That's the only thing that needs to be said today. In some ways it's the only thing that can be said. That Jesus has been raised from the dead is the only thing I really have to tell you today. Nothing more. Nothing less. It's the same thing the angel told the two women who went to Jesus' tomb. He didn't tell them once but twice.

“He is not here; he has been raised.” “He has been raised from the dead.” It was true. They saw Jesus. They touched him. They heard his voice. It was all true.

St. Matthew doesn't offer much more than that in his account of the gospel. He does not explain how it happened, only that it did. He is more interested in us living the truth of this story than he is in us knowing the details of the story. The truth of this story, as he tells it, is earth shaking. It changes the ground on which we stand and the way in which we live.

Every year I come to this day wanting only one thing. I want to be told and reminded that the story is true, that it can be trusted, that it is a reality in my life. I suspect that's what you also want and why you are here today.

Why do I say that? Why do I come here every year wanting to be reminded the story is true? Why do I think that's what you want?

Because last week I officiated at a celebration of life service for a woman who left a legacy of love behind her and was looking forward to being welcomed into paradise by Jesus the Christ. Because in the midst of all the change in our lives due to the pandemic we are experiencing I need to have the certainty of the Risen Savior affirmed once again. Because in the middle of the fear and stress of the times we are living in, I want to hear Christ say to me as he did to those women, “Do not be afraid.” I am with you.

That's why I come here today wanting to be reminded that this story is true. And you know what? I never leave disappointed. I always am reminded that the truth of Easter---life, light, joy, hope---is greater than the truth of what brought me here.

And I don't for one minute think that this is only about me. I think you know exactly what I am talking about. I don't think you are any different from me. We are all suffering from the effects of this COVID 19 virus changing our lives in ways we could never have anticipated. We are all grieving over the losses of what was and won't be again. We are all looking for light in the midst of darkness.

That's why I think you are wanting to hear this message today. Wanting to be told and reminded that this story is true. And you know what? You are in just the right spot and the right place. You will not be disappointed. The angel's message to the women in today's gospel is the Church's message to us today. “He has been risen from the dead.” It is still true.

The story is true. You can count on it. It's for you and your life. It was true yesterday, it is true today, and it will be true tomorrow. This truth doesn't change!

Sometimes it takes months or even years for resurrection to free us from the tomb and pull us out of the darkness but it will. That is the promise of today. God never leaves anyone in the darkness of the tomb. The stone has been rolled away from the tomb. The day dawns with a new light. The earth quakes in celebration and joy. Christ is risen and in him so have you and I.

“Greetings!” Jesus says to the women. “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” That's it. He was tortured and executed, went to hell and back, and that's all he says. It's basically a repeat of what the angel had told the two women. It's a pretty simple statement.

There's just not a lot of drama in the resurrection for Jesus. Jesus does not make the empty tomb and “eggstravaganza.” He could have. But he didn't. Jesus and

his disciples are already in Jerusalem. They could have met there. What better place than the center of political and religious power? But they didn't. He could have made a theatrical appearance before the Roman authorities and the religious leaders. But he didn't. He could have called attention to himself. "Hey, look at me. I'm back. I told you so." But he didn't. Instead he offered greetings and then sent his disciples back to Galilee and said that they would see him there.

Galilee was their hometown. Jesus was sending them home. He is sending them back to what is known and familiar, to the ordinary and routine, to the rhythms of everyday life. That, he says, is where we'll see him. Those are the places where his life intersects with and transforms our lives. They are described in the Bible stories we hear all the time.

**This past Friday it was Jesus so completely identifying with us that he gets up on the cross with us, suffers with us, and dies with us. There's something hopeful and life-giving in that. There's something of resurrection in that.

**On Thursday he gathered us around his table to eat and drink in remembrance.

He fed us with his body and blood, and our lives were nourished. Resurrection.

**On Palm Sunday Jesus chose the will to life over the will to power.

Resurrection.

**What about the raising of Lazarus? Unbind him and let him go. When have you been unbound and freed? Resurrection.

**The cleansing of the temple and reorienting life to God is about resurrection.

When have you cleaned out the old and made a new start? That's resurrection.

**Jesus fed the 5000 in the midst of the wilderness. The disciples looked around and saw nothing. It was an empty place to them. When have you found nourishment in the desolate places of life? Who fed you? That's resurrection.

**Have you ever felt stuck, and without energy or direction in life? Remember the lame man and Jesus saying, "Stand up, take your mat and walk? That's resurrection.

**Have you ever felt unwanted, unacceptable, unloved, or maybe even uncomfortable? Jesus ate with tax collectors, outcasts, and sinners. They and we have a place at his table. Resurrection.

**Have you ever had new insights into your life, a new way of seeing the world, another person, or yourself? Every blind man whose eyes were opened by Jesus experienced new life, resurrection.

**When was a time you felt at home, comfortable in your own skin, as if you had made it to the promised land after wandering in the wilderness? Yes, that's resurrection, too.

**Recall a time you offered or received forgiveness, and you worked with another to rebuild trust. Resurrection.

**When Israel was raised up from Egypt and freed from bondage that also was a resurrection. When have you been released from patterns and behaviors that impoverished and diminished your life?

**Have you ever had a time when order came out of chaos or light from darkness and you felt recreated, renewed, and alive? Yes, that too is resurrection.

So on this Easter Sunday let me ask you this. Where do you expect to see Jesus?

Here in Pine Bluffs? In your home? Among family and friends? In strangers, foreigners, and those who are different from you? In the midst of suffering and death? In the joys and celebrations of life? In times of insight and learning? In relationships? In silence and stillness? In the attempts to live a good life? In the failings to live a good life? In the pain and heartbreak of life? In the struggle to rebuild a relationship? In the refugee? In your marriage? In the challenges of parenting? In becoming the parent and caretaker of your own mother or father? In the midst of illness? Old age? In good conversation and laughter? In intimacy and vulnerability with another?

Yes, the answer is yes. Those and a thousand other places are where resurrection is. Don't you see that we have been entrusted with the gifts of resurrection? We are the resurrection miracle. Resurrection does not exist separate and apart from

our lives and it is not exclusive to Jesus. We find Jesus in our ordinary everyday life—even if the very definition of that life has changed in unimaginable ways, even in that life is still evolving in the midst of this pandemic. We are still loving God and loving each other as Christ commanded us. This day is intended to reveal the resurrection truth and reality of all other days.

The stone was not rolled away from Jesus' tomb to make his resurrection possible. It wasn't rolled away so that Jesus could get out. It was so that we could see in.

So we could see that there is no death, there is only life. Resurrection isn't just an event in history, it is a way of being. It is a life fully lived. The empty tomb is not simply the conclusion to Holy Week, a divine remedy to a human tragedy. It is the epitome and recapitulation of everything Jesus said, did, or taught. When it comes to resurrection it seems God just can't help himself. Resurrection is just who and how God is. There is nothing but life. There is only life.

One Easter, a pastor asked a group of kids what Jesus said when he came out of the tomb. One little boy wanted to be called on so much that he jumped and wiggled so the pastor asked him. The little boy stood up and very proudly said, "Jesus said, 'Ta da!'" with his arms spread wide! I thought about that little boy when I was thinking about this message. "He is Risen!" This is awesome, and his answer was too, in its childlike way.

Easter reminds us that the light of the resurrection always prevails. Darkness cannot overcome light. Regardless of who you are, the light prevails. Regardless of what you have done or left undone, the light prevails. Regardless of your doubts or beliefs, the light prevails. Regardless of your life's circumstances, the light prevails. I can't tell you how it happens but I know it does. The light of resurrection always wins. Everything about today says we can trust that.

That changes everything about how we live. We now live everyday as Easter.

Christ's resurrection is not a one day celebration. It is a way of life. It means every cross flowers with new life, every tomb becomes a womb of new birth, and every darkness has been overcome by light.

It's true. It's still true. Christ is risen!!!

Please pray with me. God of mystery and might, your wondrous love always seems to catch us off guard. We come to the tomb looking for death, but find life instead.

As we behold the glory of salvation, take us back to that moment of discovery—when grief and loss gave way to a glimmer of hope. Before we shout our alleluias, remind us of the moment when despair was transported into glimpses of new possibilities. In the holy awe of Easter morning, we take a moment of silent gratitude that Christ calls each of us by name. (Moment of silence.) Shout it from the mountaintop: Christ is risen! Alleluia!! Christ is risen indeed.

Receive our lament, Lord of Life, for during your final days, we turned away from you, even after you shared table with us, offering us the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation; and in your hour of greatest need, we fell asleep while you prayed in the garden, even after you urged us to keep the faith to avoid the time of trial.

But we are here now, dearest friend, remembering what it cost you to know the joy we feel today. May our lives reflect the depth of our gratitude to be known as your disciples.

In this time of trial as the global community suffers despair from our losses to the COVID 19 virus, we petition you, Lord, to turn this grief and loss into glimmers of hope. Help us to look for those glimpses of new possibilities for our "new normal" as we trust you to turn evil into good. You continue to walk with us thru this valley of the shadow of death and we know your promises are true. You will not abandon us but you will strengthen and sustain us for the journey ahead. We pray for all our first responders who risk their lives for us. Protect them from harm and keep them safe. We pray for our families, our friends, our church and our world that you will protect us, too, in your mercy and grace. Our daily walk with you has become more and more precious and we thank you for your presence in our lives, loving us and holding us tight. Christ is risen!! Amen.

