

Sermon for Easter Sunday

Year B

April 1, 2018

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Isaiah 25:6-9 Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 Acts 10:34-43 John 20:1-18

Awaken us, O God, to the wonder of the resurrection,
and give us a sense of the miracle of new life in Christ.

- The Rev. Renee Miller, Walk and Be Well

During the past seven days, we, at St. Patrick's have taken part in Holy Week, a series of worship experiences through which we've recalled the ministry and passion of Jesus.

Palm Sunday set the stage.

We began by hearing about Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

Shortly afterward, we participated in the reading of the passion narrative which described Jesus' trial, crucifixion, and death.

Maundy Thursday reminded us of how Jesus and the disciples took part in a Passover meal. On that night, known by many as The Last Supper, Jesus and the disciples reminded themselves of how God rescued the enslaved descendants of Jacob, and freed them from the Pharaoh's grip.

The disciples also experienced being in Jesus' presence in a whole new way, in the bread and wine of that very first Eucharistic meal.

We at St. Patrick's re-enacted that sacred night by way of a simple Agape Meal, washing rituals, Holy Eucharist and the stripping of the altar.

On Good Friday, by taking part in an interactive Stations of the Cross, we witnessed, as the people of Jerusalem did, the terrible and shocking series of events that led to Jesus' death on a cross.

On Saturday, also known as Holy Saturday, St. Patrick's was an empty building, void of activity, much like the stunned hearts of Jesus' followers, frozen in shock.

Today we're gathered here to celebrate Easter Sunday, the great Day of Resurrection. We've sung joyful songs, welcomed back the *Alleuias* with ringing bells and cheerful voices, and proclaimed, "Alleluia! Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!"

In Forty Days we've recalled Jesus baptism, temptation, public ministry; his teaching of truths, healing broken bodies and spirits, and denouncing political abuse and religious corruption. In seven days, the church has re-enacted the major events of Jesus' suffering and death, and now we celebrate his resurrection, his victory over death.



Imagine for a moment a small girl with her father, in a large department store. She momentarily lets go of her dad's hand and wanders off looking at all the fascinating items in the aisles and displays. When she turns from the latest distraction, she becomes aware that her father is no longer at her side. Out of sight - gone! For the young child it's a Good Friday moment. She's lost her anchor. What does she do? She becomes gripped with fear and begins to cry.

Not three days, but more likely three minutes or even three seconds later, her father re-appears around the corner of the nearest display. He stretches out his hand saying, “Come with me, my child. You’re safe now.” The weeping is overcome with sudden joy. For the little one, now, it’s Easter.

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Let’s take a moment to honestly ask ourselves, “Where are we in our lives right now, really?” Would our present life circumstances be better described as Good Friday, in shock and fearful of what may be coming next? Are we living in Holy Saturday, numb, with a feeling of emptiness? Or are we truly experiencing Easter, filled with joy and redemption, previously lost, but now found? Formerly imprisoned, and now, freed?

We need to be aware that regardless of what the liturgical calendar is telling us, not all of us are spiritually and emotionally in the same place. So what do we do?

Well let’s look back at that calendar, at its assigned bible passages, and at some recent news events, to see what they might tell us.

Some of us may be in a Good Friday state of mind and heart. Possibly, someone dear to us has died, or we’ve lost our source of employment, or a close personal relationship appears to be falling apart. On the day of Jesus’ crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea, was one of those people. He was unable to stop the cruelty. Nor could he prevent Jesus’ murder. He had only one thing to offer. And so, he did all he could do. He gave his own freshly hewn grave for Jesus to be buried in.

Several weeks ago, America witnessed the Parkland shootings. Innocent children and teachers were mercilessly killed and injured. Like the people at the crucifixion, America stood and watched in shock. The senseless killing had happened again. We were left feeling helpless about what to do. At first, we gave all we could. We held the victims and their families in our prayers

Others of us may be living Holy Saturday, the period of time after Jesus burial when the disciples were smothered in their grief and paralyzed by fear. They had no idea of what would happen next. Today, someone in the Holy Saturday phase of their life may be one who's buried in debt, or one who's fretfully awaiting the results of a medical test, or watching the mail to see if it will bring a college rejection or an acceptance letter. Like Jesus' followers, maybe what we need to do then is to experience our angst or our grief; and not deny the pain, or numb our senses, or pretend that our form of death encounter didn't happen. Those of us who see our friends struggling, can be like Joseph of Arimathea. We can become aware of the resources, similar past experiences, talents, and abilities that we possess that we can offer and share. We can be generous, give of our time, lend a listening ear, and share what we have, be it food, or companionship, or when appropriate, advice.

In Parkland, Florida, people ministered by their presence at funerals and at candle light vigils. They made memorials out of flowers, stuffed animals, notes, and balloons. That was Holy Saturday for them.

Today is Easter. The day when the totally unexpected, happened.  
Jesus rose from the grave, he conquered death,  
and he gave instructions to Mary Magdalene for what she was to do next.  
Those directions are for those of us, who are the “Marys” of today, too.

We’ve seen how Parkland students and parents are taking the reins  
after such a disastrous event.  
They’re speaking out. They’re taking action, and possibly starting a movement.  
As a result, companies are changing their policies regarding gun sales  
without waiting for a sluggish legislation process to make the decision for them.  
Students nationwide have staged organized walkouts to raise awareness  
of their concerns about their safety and of their outrage at the violence.

So, now, Easter folks, what do we do?  
Those of us who have experienced being in the presence of the risen Christ;  
those of us who have returned from our own kind of death;  
if we’ve been lost and then found; and are now experiencing a new life;  
we too, like the apostles, are to demonstrate that we’ve been changed.  
What we are to do, is to go to others.  
We are to tell what we’ve experienced, and share what we know,  
and give what we have.

Mary told the disciples, “I have seen the Lord.”  
Let’s consider, in what ways we’ve seen the Lord at work,  
in our lives, or through the actions of others,  
and how we can share that knowledge.

The apostle, Paul, told people he met along his travels how he encountered God's mercy through forgiveness for the treacherous actions of his past.

If we've been changed by the hand of God, our loving actions and our honest words can bring God's love to others too.

The psalmist proclaimed, "The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation."

So, let each of us take time to ponder the times when we've found strength in Jesus.

Let's remember how we've been empowered by the Holy Spirit, to do things, to say things, we never thought we could do.

Then let's step out, take action, and be Easter people who use the gifts that God has given us to touch the lives of those we meet each and every day.  
Amen.

Sources:

*The New Interpreters Study Bible*, NRSV with Apocrypha, Abington Press, Nashville, 2003

Sermon by Katerina K. Whitley, 2006