

David C. Myers
April 24, 2011
Easter

“See You in Galilee”

Matthew 28:10

Text: “The angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; . . . He has been raised from the dead, and indeed He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him.”

. . . Matthew 28:6 - 7

It’s so good to see everyone here to celebrate Easter! It has come to be such a festive holiday and the church is so beautiful with the flowers, banners and all of you to celebrate. The choir and musicians – brassy and otherwise – add so much to our celebration.

But we need to remember it wasn’t that way on the first Easter. Today we come knowing that Christ is Risen; but to the disciples and the followers of Jesus the first Easter morning was a time of fear and dread followed by even more confusion.

It was very early in the morning – before dawn (**lights go down**). Some of the most faithful followers of Jesus, people who had supported him in His ministry and work, were trudging to the tomb, hoping to anoint His body. One last faithful act for someone they had admired and loved. But on the way to the tomb . . . there was an earthquake, (**Randy and Susan enter talking excitedly, but fearfully**) and then . . . listen to Randy and Susan tell the story.

Susan: All I know is we came early to check on the body. The Sabbath was over and we brought spices for anointing. You know?

Randy: First of all who’s we?

Susan: Me and the two Mary’s and like I said we got to the tomb and found the stone rolled away and Jesus wasn’t there.

Randy: He wasn’t there?

Susan: I told you he wasn’t there.

Randy: What do you think they did with him?

Susan: (frustrated) I don’t know. There was a young man sitting in a white robe and he said “do not be afraid.” But we were trembling with fear!

Randy: Then what?

Susan: He told us to look at the place where Jesus was laid to rest.

Randy: I’m going to go in and look for myself. (He goes into the tomb which could be the side closet and comes out looking confused)
(musing to himself) He’s not there.

Susan: I told you he’s not there.

Randy: I wonder where they’ve taken him.

Susan: All I know was the next thing the man in white linen told us was, “Go quickly and tell His disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him!’”

Thanks Susan and Randy! **(lights back on)**

Perhaps you didn’t come to church today with quite the fear and confusion that Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” had when they went to the first Easter . . . and then again maybe some of you did.

Earlier this week, an elderly couple received a phone call from their son who lives far away. The son said he was sorry, but he wouldn’t be able to come for a visit over the holidays after all. “The grandkids say hello.” They assured him that they understood, but when they hung up the phone they didn’t dare look at each other.

Earlier this week, a woman was called into her supervisor’s office to hear that times are hard for the company and they had to let her go. “So sorry.” She cleaned out her desk, packed away her hopes for getting ahead, and wondered what she would tell her kids.

Earlier this week, someone received terrible news from a physician.

Someone else heard the words, “I don’t love you anymore.

Earlier this week, someone’s hope was crucified.

And the darkness is overwhelming.

No one is ever ready to encounter Easter until he or she has spent time in the dark place where hope cannot be seen. Easter is the last thing we are expecting. And that is why it terrifies us. This day is not about bunnies, springtime and girls in cute new dresses and boys in their first Easter suit.

Easter is about more hope than we can handle.

We all have made a trip to the cemetery to pay our final respects to a loved one. That gives us some basis upon which we can identify with the women, who according to Matthew, set out as the first pale fingers of dawn touch the sky. Their steps are slow and halting; they are worn out from weeping; and they expected nothing. Did you notice that when the Scripture from Matthew was read, that Matthew wrote, “After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning . . .” This was the equivalent of our Monday – what’s more, very early on Monday morning! Now it is Sunday, of course, which became the Christian day of worship in response to the resurrection, but the resurrection happened on Monday morning – even before they had their first cup of coffee!! Talk about when you least expect it!

They certainly don’t expect to encounter the living Christ Who says simply, “Do not be afraid; go and tell My brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see Me.” To us “Galilee” sounds like some sanctified place in the holy land – a place where some of you have visited – as tourists. But to the women and the other disciples; going to Galilee would be rich with meaning. Galilee was their home. Galilee was where it all started. Galilee was where they lived, where they worked, where they were raised and where they would raise their families.

And Galilee was where they had first met this itinerant teacher with the infectious smile Who called them to leave their fishing boats and tax tables and follow Him. Galilee was where they had learned from Him how to heal the sick and feed the hungry and care for the poor. And, yes, Galilee was where they first misunderstood Him and failed Him. Galilee was where they interrupted Him at prayer; tried to silence beggars who called out to Him; and turned away parents who brought young children for Him to bless.

And still Jesus loved them; and His resurrection means that they have another chance to get it right! For Galilee is where we experience not only His resurrection; but our resurrection to abundant life, as well. The only real way for you to experience resurrection is to experience not only Christ's resurrection, but your own resurrection.

Every Easter we sing the words of the best theologian in the Methodist tradition, Charles Wesley. I have sung it in small churches both rural and urban, where a young teenager is playing the trumpet, and I can remember seeing the relief on his face when he's finished. And I have sung it in churches with a small orchestra where we come to the verse that says, "Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia! Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!" Then comes the verse that reminds me of our true nature and destiny: "Made like him, like Him we rise, Alleluia! Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!"

You see Easter is not only about Christ's resurrection, but your resurrection as well!

When H. L. Mencken was told that Calvin Coolidge was dead, he responded, "how can we tell?" And as unfair as that may have been to President Coolidge, it hints at the New Testament understanding of "death." In the New Testament, death is not limited to physical death – to when we stop breathing. Death happens when the proverbial rug is pulled out from under us and we are paralyzed with fear, not knowing what to do, what decisions to make. Death happens when we feel as though we have no resources, no power to change anything.

Notice that the first thing the Resurrected Christ says, according to Matthew, is "do not be afraid!" Because Jesus has gone before us to the Galilee of death we can say with the Apostle Paul, "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death is your victory?" "Where, O death, is your sting?" (I Corinthians 15:54-55) "We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord. If we die, we die to the Lord; so, then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." (Romans 14:7 – 8)

The sting of death is **the fear of death** in all of its forms; and Christ overcomes our fear. Death is taken seriously in the Bible, but the resurrection removes its "sting."

A little boy and his father were driving down a country road on a beautiful spring afternoon. Suddenly out of nowhere a bee flew in the car window. Since the little boy was deathly allergic to bee stings, he became petrified. But the father quickly stopped the car, reached out, grabbed the bee, and squeezed it in his hand. Then he released it. But as soon as he let it go the young boy became frantic once again as the bee buzzed around in the car.

His father saw his son's panic stricken face. Once again the father reached out his hand, but this time he pointed to his hand. There still stuck in his skin was the stinger of the bee. "Do you see this?" he said. "You don't need to be afraid anymore, I've taken away the stinger for you."

E. B. White has a wonderful description of his wife, Katherine as she sat outside on a nice day in the last autumn of her life. She was developing the chart that would be used to plant the bulbs in her garden. She is under hospice care and knows that she will not be there to see the spring flowers which the bulbs will produce. White writes: "There is something comical yet touching in her bedraggled appearance . . . the small, hunched-over figure . . . oblivious to the ending of her own days, which she knew perfectly well was near at hand, sitting there with her detailed chart under those dark skies in dying October, calmly plotting the resurrection."

I believe that there was in Jesus of Nazareth a quality of being over which death had no dominion. And the real "evidence" of the resurrection is not the stories of the empty tomb, but in the changed lives of the disciples – the original disciples and those of us who are disciples now. The fellowship with the living Christ changed the cowardly into the courageous; doubters into believers; and the despairing into the hopeful.

Death in the Biblical sense is not limited to the grave. Death appears in all its ugly forms wherever there is alienation, separation and oppression. Whenever derives one's own sense of worth from demeaning others, there death prevails. Whenever profits come before persons, there death does its work. Life that is crippled by fear of living is life that already knows death. Life that knows no loyalty greater than self-promotion already knows death.

But, thank God, resurrection also happens on this side of the grave. Easter happens wherever brokenness is healed; whenever love transforms lives; whenever reconciliation surges across the gaps of alienation and rejection to make life whole and deep and full once again. The poet G. Manly Hopkins uses the intriguing phrase, "Let Christ Easter in You." "New lives for old!" That's the only real proof of the Resurrection! My prayer for you is that Christ may Easter in you!

Harrell Beck, world renowned Old Testament scholar and even in more demand as a preacher was both my parishioner in the Lexington, MA UMC and my preaching mentor. He would often say, "I have finished but I am not done yet. I have one more grace note!

This morning I have one more grace note.

You probably do not remember the name Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin. During his day he was as powerful a man as there was on earth. A Russian Communist leader he took part in the Bolshevik Revolution 1917, was editor of the Soviet newspaper Pravda (which by the way means truth), and was a full member of the Politburo. His works on economics and political science are still read today. There is a story told about a journey he took from Moscow to Kiev in 1930 to address a huge assembly on the subject of

atheism. Addressing the crowd he aimed his heavy artillery at Christianity hurling insult, argument, and proof against it.

An hour later he was finished. He looked out at what seemed to be the smoldering ashes of men's faith. "Are there any questions?" Bukharin demanded. Deafening silence filled the auditorium but then one man approached the platform and mounted the lectern standing near the communist leader. He surveyed the crowd first to the left then to the right. Finally he shouted the ancient greeting known well in the Russian Orthodox Church: "CHRIST IS RISEN!" En masse the crowd arose as one man and the response came crashing like the sound of thunder: "HE IS RISEN INDEED!"

So let's see if Easter has the same meaning to us that it had in communist Russia. Can you respond antiphonally with the words "He Is Risen Indeed!" as assuredly as did the crowd in Kiev after the lecture on atheism?

For I say to you this morning: CHRIST IS RISEN!

(congregational response should be: HE IS RISEN INDEED!).