

Risen! In-deed
Easter ~ March 23, 2008

Matthew 28: 1 - 10

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ²And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of God, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³The angel's appearance was like lightning, with garments white as snow. ⁴The guards shook with fear and fell down as though they were dead. ⁵But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; for he has been raised, exactly as it was foretold. Come and see the burial place. ⁷Then go quickly and tell the disciples, 'Jesus has been raised from the dead, and indeed is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see Jesus there.' This is the message I have for you." ⁸So the women left the tomb quickly with awe and great joy, and ran to tell the good news to the disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus stood before them and said, "Shalom!" The women came to Jesus, embraced his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell the disciples to go to Galilee; where they will see me."

* * * * *

Christ the Lord is risen today! Alleluia!

Throughout all of Christendom, this chorus of victory is heard on this Easter Day.

And we gather, not only on this Sunday, but on all Sundays to proclaim Christ's resurrection. Last week at Confirmation Class, I explained to our 16 confirmands that without Easter, there would be no Christianity. The resurrection is at the heart of our Christian faith. Just like the cornerstone was laid here at 16 Sylvan Street before any of the church structure was built, so, too, is the resurrection the cornerstone of our faith.

After a long and sobering week, a week that saw Jesus crucified, an innocent man nailed to a cross, paying the consequences for teaching and living God's intentions here on earth, we gather this Easter morning to celebrate the Good News, the victory of God's seemingly powerless love over loveless power.

"Did resurrection really happen?" our rational minds are quick to ask. We grope for a scientific explanation. Maybe Jesus was just in a deep, drugged coma in the tomb and finally woke up? Maybe the women and the disciples got all worked up in their grief and they just fantasized the whole thing?

William Willimon offers wise words when he writes:

**"You can't explain a resurrection.
Resurrection explains us."**

(Pulpit Resource, Vol. 30. No.1. p.58)

Look what happened to Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James! They were curious on that first Easter morn. Notice that unlike other gospel narratives, in Matthew they do not bring spices and oils to anoint Jesus' body. They arrive intending to "see" the tomb. This verb "to see" connotes understanding of or insight into God's purposes. These women had heard Jesus' teaching about being raised on the third day. I believe that they came literally "to see" if everything he prophesized was true. They did not come prepared to anoint a dead body: they came to see that resurrection had happened.

Reminiscent of Matthew's Nativity Story, it is an angel that announces "Don't be afraid" and proceeds to roll away the stone from the first century tomb. "Jesus is not here. He has been raised from the dead" the angel explains to the women. "Indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee." With awe and joy the women run to tell the disciples the Good News. And on route, they meet the Risen Christ. "Shalom" he says to them. And their response is not one of questioning Jesus. How can you be here? Are you really alive? No! their immediate response is to bow down, to embrace those very feet that have walked with them on their faith journey, and to worship the Risen Christ.

**"You can't explain a resurrection.
Resurrection explains us."**

And so it is for us on this Easter Sunday, Jesus disciples of Holy Trinity. Resurrection explains us! On this Sunday, one week before our 50th anniversary celebration, I want to reminisce a bit and celebrate moments of resurrection that explain us in our 50 year history here at 16 Sylvan Street. Thanks to an awesome and able 50th Anniversary History Committee that included Dorothy Pickett, chairperson, Gail Bean, Shirley Teague, Thelma Temple and Tracy Bell, Recording Secretary, I have ample material for illustrations.

When I read today's scripture, I was particularly struck by the word "indeed." Jesus told the Marys that he would see them "indeed" in Galilee. In deed. On Easter, we often use the refrain "Christ is risen. He is risen in-deed. The "deed" in the word "indeed" connotes action. Christ is risen again and again through accomplishments, through endeavors, through action. "Christ is risen. He is risen "in deed!!" Let's use this as a refrain. I say "Christ is risen" and you respond "He is risen in-deed!" (with an emphasis on deed)

And just what are some of those "deeds" that demonstrate to us and our neighbors – locally and globally- that resurrection explains us, Jesus' living disciples at Holy Trinity?

It all began with a plot of fallow land on Sylvan Street, owned by the Town of Danvers. On January 24, 1956, an agreement was reached for the church to purchase the land for \$12,000. with the condition that within 4 years after the sale construction of the new church would be started or the town would have the right to purchase the land back for the same amount of money. Time was of the essence and soon, up from the ground "she" arose! And as we know on Palm Sunday, March 23, 1958, members processed from the old Methodist Church on Holton Street to their new church home on Sylvan Street.

Christ is risen!
He is risen, in-deed!

Rev. Donald Paige brought a resurrection spirit to the Holy Trinity congregation. He believed that resurrection explains us as he visited door to door, offering people a church home and inviting people to become disciples of Jesus Christ. A newly built bell tower was dedicated on May 15, 1958 and weekly and on special occasions the bell tolled the Good News across town. Almost 50 years later, resurrection happened again. This time it followed the death of Matt Graham, Bill Eaton and Robert Wood, Jr. By the grace of God and the hard work and gifts of these families and their friends, new life was given to the bells in that tower and once again, they proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ every time they ring.

Christ is risen!
He is risen, in-deed!

In July of 1979, resurrection explained the deeds of Holy Trinity once again. This time it was the decision to sponsor a family of Vietnamese refugees. Just as Lazarus was called out of the tomb and unbound, just as Jesus Christ was brought back from the dead, so the Quan family, Tu Van and her 4 children (Quing, Sung Huong, My Huong and Duc), were given the gift of new life, hope and unconditional love. Shortly thereafter in 1980, Chinh Nguyen's family was sponsored and in 1981, Le Van Kien and his family arrived from Vietnam. So many people offered deeds of kindness - food, clothing, housing, medical attention, education, government paper work, language lessons! Ah yes,

Christ is risen!
He is risen, in-deed!

Last Sunday, Rob and Diane Roy were here from the west coast and visited their "home church" as they call Holy Trinity. Active members for many years, the Roys had another resurrection story to tell. Anan Copty, a 17 year old Christian Palestinian, was sponsored by Holy Trinity and the Roys in 1989 to come to Danvers to complete his highschool education. Many of you might remember Anan. At the time, this bright young man was unable to finish high school in the West Bank because of the raging Intifada. Here he lived with the Roys, graduated from Danvers High, went on to graduate from Gordon college and then earned a PhD in physics from Boston College. He is married, has 2 children, and works for Intel as a Research Physicist. He considers the Roys his adopted family and they love him as one of their own children. You can't explain resurrection. Resurrection explains us.

Christ is risen!
He is risen, in-deed!

And have not recent deeds of this congregation brought new life to many?
meals served at Salem Mission, by adults and children
and youth groups;
food and contributions made monthly to our next door neighbor,
the People to People Food Pantry;
monthly Blood Pressure Clinics, soon to be offered community wide;

Ecumenical Katrina Mission Teams that have brought
hope and resurrection
to dozens of families in New Orleans,
without whom
they would not have a house to live in;
children in our partner community, Las Flores, Nicaragua,
who have school supplies for the first time ever
and adults who are among the poorest in our world who have medicine and
medical care as a result of our generous contributions.

Oh yes,

Christ is risen!
He is risen, in-deed!

There are so many other examples of “resurrection explaining us,” Christ’s body of Holy Trinity believers.

Think of all those that have come into this chancel to be baptized,
to be confirmed, to be buried from this church.

Every time we come to the rail for communion,
we rise up into the newness of life with Christ
again and again and again.

Think of all those who have participated in the incredible music programs
– the choirs, the musicals, the Praise Team, instrumentalists,
and through music have contributed to the spiritual life of the whole community.

Think of the toddlers that have enrolled in our Jack and Jill
Nursery School who have learned what it means to treat someone else as you
would want to be treated yourself.

And how can we begin to count the number of children
and youth who have attended our Sunday School
and Youth Programs and Confirmation Classes
and learned what it means to be a Christian in today’s world?

Oh, yes! Resurrection explains us, Holy Trinity disciples of a Risen Christ.

Christ is risen!
He is risen, in-deed!

May the resurrection spirit continue to inspire us. May resurrection continue to explain us. May
we continue to be more than a people of faith and be a people of action because

Christ is risen!
He is risen, in-deed!

Alleluia! Amen and Amen!

