



**EASTER SUNDAY
APRIL 12, 2020
“THAT FIRST EASTER”**

MARK 15: 1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”



Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).

Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

SERMON

I have struggled to find the right spirit for our Easter worship this morning.

The pews are empty. No Easter flowers. No incredible organ preludes by Ed. No great anthems by the choir. No alleluias. No shouts of he is risen. No Easter breakfast.

I am terrible at playing hymns, so i can assure you that if i attempted thine is the glory or Jesus Christ is risen today, you would put your fingers in your ears. But, at the end of our worship service, Ed kasha, our director of music and liturgy, will grace us with fifteen minutes of Easter hymns. So stay tuned...

In order to get into the spirit of that first Easter, i went to the gospels of Matthew, mark, Luke, and john to see how the people who were present at that first Easter responded. What a novel idea!



Frankly, this Easter provides us the opportunity to clear out the non-essentials to focus on that first Easter....

The primary feeling in Matthew's account is fear or what we would call anxiety.

Mark's gospel account references alarm, terror, and amazement, along with more fear.

In Luke, those first at the tomb are perplexed and terrified. In addition, those who first heard the news of Jesus being alive thought of it as an idle tale.

And in John, Mary weeps at the tomb and then thinks Jesus is the gardener, along with more fear and anxiety.

No shouts of "he is risen!" No alleluias. No joy. No excitement.

No, only fear, anxiety, terror, amazement, disbelief, perplexity, confusion, weeping, and alarm.

Perhaps what many of us are feeling this Easter 2020?

You see, it actually took quite a while for those present at that first Easter to make sense of it all. Reflection was needed. Time was needed.



Yes, Christ is risen. Christ arose that first Easter and is now present in the midst of us. In the midst of this pandemic. Risen amidst the death and destruction around.

Yet I'd like to change the language and suggest that Christ is rising in our midst, and like that first Easter, we must reflect on what it means for us.

This year, the reality of resurrection asks: how are we being transformed for the better?

How are we discerning the values that are most important to you?

How is Christ's rising in us moving us to help other people—people that a few months ago, we would not have given a second glance?

How are we deepening into a fresh spirituality through the death and resurrection of the Christ?

How are we becoming aware of how our nation must be transformed? How the world community must be transformed?

How is Christ rising in us stripping us of the non-essentials in our lives?

The rising Christ brings about an awakening of our hearts, minds, spirits, and souls....



For example, in Christ's rising this Easter, i am so much more aware of the poor.

After the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, he goes to the temple in Nazareth and reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, as a way to announce his purpose on earth:

“The spirit of the lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the lord's favor.”

Christ's arising this Easter has the power to open our eyes to the plight of the poor who most often have remained hidden to us. The hungry are at the door of the church every day. As of Good Friday, we have given out \$13,045 in grocery gift cards to 333 individuals and families.

What has risen in so many people is the gift of generosity and care for the less fortunate. How grateful we are to be able to help so many people because you are rising to the occasion in helping us feed the hungry.

In Christ's rising, my eyes have been opened to the heavy burden that the poor in this country carry every day while the 1% live in regal comfort.

Christ's rising opens our blind eyes to the painful realities around us. Remember that first Easter was filled with anxiety, terror, weeping, perplexity and confusion. His rising made no one feel joyous.



What Christ's rising actually does is turn the world upside down.

As the old spiritual masters would say, "The way up is the way down." Our rising comes from being lowered into the depths of reality.

As a pastor, Christ's arising awakens in me the deep responsibility i have to the people of CLC. Christ's arising has put me in touch of how much love i have for you. How much i value our faith community. How much we need new people to join us in caring for the larger community.

Christ's rising this Easter calls us to ask: why are we here?

Aren't we here to open our hearts and minds to Christ rising within us so we can serve those in need in whatever way we can? Aren't we to be transformed as servants?

In Christ's rising, i am filled with gratitude. To Pastor Erik at element church, the teachers of the Shaler school district, new sun rising who just awarded us a forgivable loan, pastors Scott and Darren and the people of Northway, our friends throughout the country. Strange bedfellows, perhaps in the eyes of those who cling to old denominational divisions. Lutherans and members of non-denominational congregations, Jews, and people without any religious affiliation have been joined by Christ's rising to care for those in need. Together, as of Good Friday, we have given away over \$13,000 in grocery gift cards to 333 families in need.

He is risen! He is rising within us! He is rising among us!



Within this rising of Christ, no one needs to pledge an oath to a specific denominational faith to be one of the community who Czres and serves.

The god question is resolved in each of us when we agree to bear the mystery of god: god's suffering for the world and, in Christ's rising, god's love for the world.

What is rising among us is truth. As Thomas Aquinas states: "if something is true, no matter who said it, it is always from the holy spirit."

What truth is Christ's rising touching off in you?

For all of you with children at home, i hope that what is rising for you is a new experience of being family. Mom or dad or mom and dad at home all of the time. I suspect that years from now, your children will look at this time, not as a terrible time, but as a special time they had with you. What a gift.

In Christ's arising, there has been a slowing down of life. Perhaps we will be able to carry this forward and change the ways we live and work so that new patterns and new routines rise that make more room for what is truly valuable....

What we want to be careful about this Easter is that we do not get trapped in nostalgia. Yearning for yesterday. Thinking that all that Easter hoopla was what it was all about.



Let us recall that when Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, God placed an angel with a fiery sword at the entrance as a way to say that God is not in the past. Life is not in the past. There is no going back.

God calls us from the future, pulling us forward into the new, into the rising, into the transformation of the present. In one sense, scripture is the record of the evolution of the God image, moving forward toward a greater and deeper love for all people, for all nations, for all creation.

This Easter, with Christ rising in our midst, perhaps we can be corrected of the notion that we're doing what we're doing to get to heaven, but rather we are working to make sure that God's creation does not become a living hell.....

That first Easter, out of the terror and anxiety, out of the confusion and perplexity came a worldwide movement that transformed everything: the rising of Christ transformed art, music, orphanages were built, in the name of Christ hospitals and universities were founded, the poor and elderly were cared for. Love became a motivating factor that led to safety nets for the downtrodden.

This Easter we can participate in a similar transformation that can make our communities more caring and loving.

In that first Easter, death is defeated. The ways of death and destruction have been conquered by the rising of Christ.

We can't see it yet, but with each faithful and loving gesture we participate in, we move the world forward into a more loving future.



What the arising of Christ declares is that love is stronger than death. Love wins. Love will be all that remains.

There are people dying in this moment, including people we love dearly. But love is stronger than death.

In the end, when god brings about the new heaven and new earth, we will all be included in that new creation, casting aside our failing flesh, rising as the best that we are and can be.

In that new creation, all our animal friends will be with us. All our ancestors who we have never met. All of us united in the glorious rising of Christ.

So in the midst of this suffering, Christ arises from the grave, pulling us up with him, holding onto us.

Christ always arise in the midst of death.

And my heartfelt message is that i want all of us to find new life, new ways of loving those dear to us, new ways to care for the less fortunate, new ways to be connected to one another, new ways to remove all the old barriers that divided us....

Let me conclude with a reworking of Richard Rohr's twelve ways to live resurrection now:



First, we can't help but have negative, blaming and accusatory thoughts. But we can refrain from grabbing hold of them and using them to hurt other people. Through meditation or centering prayer, learn the spiritual path of letting go of the negative.

Second, say you're sorry and ask for forgiveness when you hurt another person or contribute negatively to a situation. It heals relationships when we reconnect with the people we hurt.

Third, stay in your own mind. Do not buy into what the culture thinks is important. No one has been transformed by the brand of their jeans, a new phone, or a thousand friends on Facebook.

Fourth, choose your true self which is hidden in god. Sit in the silence with god every day. The more martin Luther had to do in a day, the longer he started the day in prayer.

Fifth, as much as possible choose to serve others rather than being served.

Sixth, work to change yourself rather than change others. You'll be surprised at how this increases your sense of personal power in the world. Jesus died and rose to show us the way of transformation.

Seventh, whoever possible, choose the common good over your own personal good. We are in this together.



Eighth, give preference to those in pain, those who are excluded, those who are hurt, those who are disabled, those who have been forgotten.

Ninth, see the best in people and tell them about it. Perhaps you will help them become more noble human beings.

Tenth, seek to live your own truth. What draws us to Jesus is that his words match his actions. Live out in action the person you want to be.

Eleventh, work through your fear. Choices made out of fear are always bad ones. Learn how to take healthy risks.

And twelfth, never doubt that it is all about love in the end. If god loves you in this life, he will continue that love in the life to come.

He is risen, my friends. He is rising. He is rising so you might have a life worth living and a death worth overcoming.

The hidden blessing of this pandemic is that we will experience a new world rising from the ashes because Christ is rising.