

April 16, 2017, Resurrection of Our Lord

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Focus: Jesus surprises us on the road.

Easter is my favorite day of the year. Early in the morning, we rise, and we come in, and everyone's in a cheerful mood... despite the 8am breakfast time. Kids are dressed in matching clothes, pretty pastel dresses for the girls, or sweater vests for the boys that they wouldn't be caught dead in the rest of the year. And after breakfast, they go look for the eggs that we have hidden along this normally unused church lawn. Then, we come in for my favorite part of the day, the joyous worship service, with huge candles, shouts of Alleluia, everyone's favorite hymns, a packed house, and kids ringing noisemakers. And then afterward, we leave and go to what actually may be my other favorite part: the amazing lunch buffet at the Clifty Inn. Easter is one giant celebration:

A celebration that, as we say: Alleluia! Christ is Risen! **He is risen indeed. Alleluia!** The message is so simple. Jesus: the man everyone had set their hopes upon, Jesus the man that everyone had been following the last three years, Jesus that gifted preacher, teacher, and the miracle-worker, that same Jesus: we thought he was done. When Jesus hung on a cross 2 days ago on Good Friday and said, "It is finished," many thought he was talking about his own life—and not only his own life, but all the hopes that he had stirred up, the hopes for a better world: a world of peace and justice, a world where everyone is put in their rightful place, where the underdog too can wear a crown, a world of endless day and joy, a world of forgiveness, a world where the killing and the war cease and are replaced with love, kindness, humility, self-control, a world in short of resurrection and life—all those hopes, people said were finished on Good Friday. And, if we're honest, had we been there at the time, we might have agreed with them.

But not today. Today is the day when those blessed three women go to the tomb, and what do they find? They find an angel. An angel who announces to them that all those hopes that Jesus had given them for a new future while he was still among them: those hopes that died on Good Friday: they are no longer dead. They are no longer buried. They are no longer in the tomb! Alleluia! See for yourself the place where Jesus lay. See for yourself the pall that covered his mortal body. See for yourself the shroud that had been lain over God's new creation. It has been taken off and shoved aside. He is not here! He is risen! And you, and the hope of a world of abundant life, the world that God has promised: they have risen, too! Alleluia! Go to Galilee, and you will see.

Brothers and sisters, that is God's moment for us right now. You have come to this place today probably for a variety of reasons and with varying levels of excitement. In this place, don't have an angel whose appearance is as lightning with clothing as white as snow preaching to you, so you'll have to take my word for it. But you with Christians generations before and generations yet to come are once again hearing the Good News of that Easter. Death cannot finish our Lord, and the tomb cannot contain him. Though our sins weigh him down to the depths of hell, Jesus will always rise again. He who was nailed to the cross is once again on the move. We stand at his empty tomb to hear one more time the words: "Christ is risen! Alleluia!"

But where is Christ? Clearly you have come to the right place. Christ isn't turning anyone away from his Church. Here you will find the gift of holy baptism in which Christ claims us as God's children. Baptism the act where we are tied to his death that we may also be tied to his resurrection. Here in the Church you will find Christ at this table where he allows us to feast on his body and blood: his very self. Here in the Church, you will find words proclaimed by angels, saints, and sinners alike that tell of what Christ has done, what he is doing, and how he will at last finish his new creation and great salvation.

But nevertheless, we join the women at the empty tomb. Empty because in a sense Christ has *moved on*. Empty because he didn't stay there and wait for others to come to him. At the tomb, nothing's left except terrified guards who overslept his wake-up call and one angel there to deliver his message, his message of Good News, but also as a call to action: "He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him."

Not here at the empty tomb. But ahead of you, where he has promised he will be. That is Christ. You see, as great as this great day is, there's more. The angel's message from Christ to the women is this: "Get up, move, share the Good News! Don't stay here." Christ calls us to get up and move. It's said that Christians are a pilgrim people. We know our final destination is the kingdom of heaven. We know that. But if we're a pilgrim people that means that we aren't just sitting in our pews or sitting in our own joy or sitting in our own justification and righteousness. It means that this message that Christ is risen motivates us. It literally moves us. In the Church, we **hear** the words of Christ. In the Church, we **taste** Christ. But if we want to **see** Christ, the angel says that you have to be on the move the other six days of the week, too.

"Indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." Christ, not leading from behind, but ahead of us, constantly calling to those who hear his voice. "I'm just ahead, in Galilee." Now for those of you who don't know, this past March, I took a trip to the Holy Land. I've been to Galilee. I even received a certificate certifying that I took a ride on the Sea of Galilee in what the certificate calls "the Jesus Boat." But I don't think that's what Christ is talking about here. I don't think that we need to take an expensive trip to the Holy Land to find Galilee or to ride the Jesus boat.

When the angel says, "He is going ahead of you to Galilee," it means one thing to the disciples: home. He is telling them go back to your homes. Go back to the people you live with. Go back to the people you work with. And tell them: tell them the Good News! And if we really believe that Good News, then let's start living it. We need not act like his promises of peace, justice, of love, of servant leadership, of equality, of hope for resurrection and life that were crucified on Good Friday still lie dead in the tomb. They don't. They rose because Christ rose. The hope of resurrection lives and is on the move. And if believe that, then why wait for the kingdom of heaven to act as if it's true? Go back to your homes, go back to your workplaces, and really start living as if Christ is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

The women do this, and, on one hand, this is an amazing act of faithfulness on their part. Unlike certain people: here's looking at you Thomas, they believe before they even see. There's an empty tomb, but there are plenty of ways that could have happened. Sure the angel's convincing, but people have seen angels before. What no one has ever seen before is the Son of God rise from the dead. What no one has ever seen before is a crucified criminal return to be the Savior of the world that he says he is. Believing this is an amazing act of faithfulness.

But you know what? We can do that. The Holy Spirit promises us that faith to trust in the hard-to-believe Good News. And the other thing that they do is simple, too. They merely do as they're told. They go home and share the Good News. And trust me: we can do that, too. Because here's the thing: if Christ really wanted the extraordinary people to do his work, he would have chosen governors like Pilate, or maybe he would have sent the angel everywhere. He didn't. He picked three women, most of whom in their era are used to being ignored at home. He picked ordinary folks like us, who announced to those super famous apostles the Good News. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do that, too.

So after the Easter feast is over, we go back to Galilee: to our homes, to where we live and work, to our communities, where it's promised we'll see Christ. But the women learned what we find so often to be true: Christ appears to them before they even make it home.

While they are still on the way, Christ appears to them. This is the miracle for a pilgrim people: not that Christ comes to us when we have arrived, when we have finally done everything that he called us to do and when we have reached our final destination, but that while we are still on the road, while we are still human, while we are still in our sins, while we are still struggling to get it right, while we still live under the shadow of death, Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, greets us. Christ always surprises us.

We find Christ in the people we didn't think we'd run into. We find Christ in the people we thought we were supposed to be the ones telling the Good News to. We find Christ while caring for someone whose body is dying but whose spirit is risen indeed, alive in the promises of the resurrection. We find Christ in the person with whom we share our material goods but whose cup runs over with the abundant resurrected life. We find Christ at the graveside in the mourning widow who can say, "Alleluia! He is risen!" even in the cross of this life. Wherever in our lives or in the world, we come to tomb, we find Christ calling us ahead to something new and better.

That is Easter. Not that the tomb is empty, but that the road is full. And when we walk on it, we will see with our own eyes the risen Christ who meets us even before we arrive at home. **Amen.**