

**Easter – Year C  
(Apr. 8, 2007)**

**He Is Risen**

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! We know what happened. He has risen as he said he would. But for Magdalen, Peter, and the disciple Jesus loved, going to the tomb that morning there was only consternation. The last thing they expected to find was an empty tomb. The body is gone. Some said stolen. But his friends reported that they had seen him, and so great was their conviction of the truth of the resurrection that their faith has come down through two thousand years and still today we proclaim, “He is risen.”

When Peter worked his first miracle in the name of Christ, to the skeptics he replied, “It was you who accused the holy and just one, you who demanded that a murderer should be released to you while you killed the prince of life. God however raised him from the dead, and to that fact we are witnesses.” (Acts 3:14-15)

We who live in the northern hemisphere tend to think of nature collaborating in our celebration of Easter. What was dead is coming back to life, bare branches blossom with new leaves. Cherry trees and daffodils are in full bloom (in spite of yesterday’s snow) after the frost and death of winter. But in countries like Chile or Australia where Easter comes in the autumn it is the time of leaves withering, dying, and falling to the ground. It’s an obvious point but worth making, because tying up Easter so closely with spring can lead us to think of it as part of the predictable cycle of the seasons.

But of course it’s not. It is very significant that the resurrection of Jesus was not part of an inevitable process. It was not, in spite of Jesus’ predictions in the Gospels. It’s probably impossible to do this but it would be instructive to read today’s Gospel as if for the first time. Mary Magdalen, Peter, and the disciple Jesus loved do not expect Jesus to have risen from the dead. Far from it. They were bruised and despairing after the events of the previous week. They had seen all their most cherished hopes and ideals smashed: truth, goodness, love, and gentleness had been

crushed by power politics and by the ruthless efficiency of the most powerful military machine in the world

I have heard people say that it is hard to believe in the resurrection “nowadays.” That seems to imply that it was easy to believe in the beginning. But the disciples and the others knew the finality of death. That someone should rise was unheard of and not part of their expectations. And yet, and yet, what they saw convinced them that something altogether unpredictable had truly happened – and they were ready to risk their lives for the rest of their days, telling people that the Lord had risen from the dead.

Orthodox Christians usually celebrate this feast on a different Sunday from us in the west, but this year, coincidentally and wondrously, the two celebrations coincide. That means that all Christians all over the world are rejoicing together as they proclaim the resurrection of the Lord.

And yet, I wonder how much joy there will be among Christians in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. Christians there must constantly face danger and death, mourn the absence of loved ones killed in the war, and perhaps not even be able to make it to church today because of the dangers of venturing out of their houses. Even in the land where Jesus lived, died, and rose from the dead, resurrection joy may be muted by the continuing strife between Israelis and Palestinians.

Maybe by some miracle of grace they will be able to recognize their present sufferings as their share in the sufferings and death of Christ. And maybe by an even greater miracle of grace they will come to realize that inevitably, after entering the Passion and death of the Lord, they will just as surely have a share in his resurrection. We can only pray that this will be true and pray, too, that those responsible will find the way to peace. After all this is also the feast of peace. When Jesus appears to his disciples on Easter Sunday night, his first word to them is, “Peace.” Peace. And he repeats it three times within just a few verses of John’s Gospel.

Perhaps we are sometimes like those troubled disciples cowering in fear in the upper room. Sometimes we, too, need to hear him say, “Peace, it’s all right and all manner of thing shall be well. I am with you in your suffering and I will bring you the joy of my resurrection. Remain in my love. It is the best way to endure the sufferings and hardships of this world.

**It is the best response to insults and violence.”**

**Today, dear friends, you and I are the witnesses at the empty tomb. We know what has happened. We rejoice and proclaim, “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.”**