

Sermon Easter Sunday Apr 4 2021  
Redeemer, Ramsey  
Pastor M Linderman

Christ is risen, Alleluia! **Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Grace, Mercy and Peace from God our creator and from our risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen

Dear friends, I want to start by thanking you for being here today. We have been through so much in the past year, and we are still burdened by the restrictions of the pandemic. We are aching to see life return to some kind of new normal. And in the meantime, we are struggling to hang on to faith in the midst of so many doubts. Our lives and the world around us are changing so rapidly these days that we wonder whether the resurrection of Jesus can serve as an anchor for our life.

So I thank you for coming on this Easter morning to hear the church's proclamation yet again.

Let's be honest. We are tired, and it is hard to hold onto faith when our hearts and minds are tired. Perhaps the most fatigue we suffer stems from the restrictions and challenges of living during the pandemic. Our schedules are different. Our routines are shattered. Every activity must be weighed against the risks. School is at the same time challenging and sub-par. We live and work and play all in the same spaces, and days and weeks blur into each other. Mentally and emotionally, we are exhausted.

We are also grieving. We have lost so much, it seems, just in the span of one year. For those who have lost a loved one to Covid, there are so many questions amidst the grief. How can something we can't see be so effective at bringing down living, thriving human beings? How was it that they were infected? How was it that they couldn't fight it off? How was it that we couldn't prevent this from happening? Even if your loved one who died recently didn't die from the virus, you still had to bear the burden of trying to grieve and honor them in the midst of restrictions on gathering, and weighing the relative danger to your family if you decided to gather together to do that grieving and honoring. But on a more basic level, everyone has lost something, even if it's just the old normal. And there's no funeral all those losses.

We are also divided. In fact, our divisions are deeper than ever. We find that we are practically living in different intellectual worlds. The news has become a team sport. Everything is about the ratings. Truth is relative. Troubling attitudes prevail. Conspiracy theories go viral. There is no center. It seems that the only rationale is to sell it, ship it, and forget about it. And the bolder the claims, the bigger the lies, the more successful you'll be. And in the midst of this intellectual and moral chaos, our sense of security weakens. Careers have shorter and shorter shelf-life. Technology outpaces our understanding. The cost of living increases every month. Violence is rampant. Democracies totter. Autocracies blossom. It used to be that nostalgia made us long for the good ol' days, but now our very sense of survival cries out for us to turn back the clock to a golden age.

Tired, grieving, divided. Kind of like the disciples of Jesus after his crucifixion. So, today's version of the resurrection, from the Gospel of Mark, fits our moment in an interesting way. This is the version where the first witnesses that something is going on simply run away and hide. That's how the Gospel of Mark in its original form ends. Later faithful scribes wrote endings that added Jesus' appearance to other disciples, but the original version is honest in a helpful way.

In this original version, when some of the women who were friends of Jesus go to the tomb on Easter morning and find it open and empty, and a young man in dazzling clothes tells them Jesus is risen, they panic. The trauma of the past week's events in Jerusalem, and the grief, guilt and anger they have felt over the past two nights has worn them down. They can't take much more. And when they find that Sunday morning all of their expectations turned upside down, and they are told that Jesus is risen, terror and amazement seize them, and they run and hide. Jesus' resurrection means everything is upside down, and nothing is what it used to be.

And dear friends, I wouldn't blame you if you feel like you want to run and hide too. Given what we've been through, and the mental resignation we all have embraced in order to carry on, resurrection seems too good to hope for. But Jesus' resurrection speaks to us, that death doesn't have the last word. For all our losses, and for our grieving hearts, that is good news. But beyond that, however, there are implications of resurrection that are just crazy enough to really scare us.

Resurrection does things that we, who are tired, grieving and divided, don't want to do ourselves. Resurrection opens up, when we want to close down. Resurrection runs ahead, we want to hold back. Resurrection agitates, we want to rest. Resurrection pushes time forward, we want to wind the clock back. Resurrection hopes for things not seen, we want only that which we can see. Resurrection shows us a god of the future, and while we long for the gods of the past.

My friends, resurrection shows us that we will have to adjust. We have to grow. We have to adapt. We have to expand our perspectives, we have to withhold judgement and wield discernment. We have to read more. We have to learn from others what they think, even while we ourselves struggle to rearticulate what we think. We have to move forward into life, not backward. The loved ones whom we have let go of, whose bodies lie in these graves, [lie still in the tomb] are themselves now living in God's time, awaiting a new heaven and a new earth. They are free to believe in a way that we are not. But resurrection means that we are called to live from now on as if that new heaven and new earth are just on the horizon. God's new world--complete love, complete justice, complete compassion and mercy, is rising from the graveyard of our expectations. God's kingdom rises in the risen Christ, unfettered by death and the despair of doubt. God's new world waits for no one. It is here, just like the noon day sun is here already in those first rays of the light of dawn.

So I encourage you, dear friends, reach for Jesus' resurrection in faith. Believe in the good news. Don't be afraid of change. God's future is worth every pang of growth. God's justice is worth every humble pill. In the midst of your terror and amazement, hold on to God's love and mercy.

And may the peace of God, which passes all our understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.