

Church of the Crossroads
Easter Sunday
April 7, 2007
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A SATURDAY PEOPLE

Isaiah 65:17-25
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
Acts 10:34-43
Luke 24:1-12

Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed!
Alleluia!

Last Monday, in our lectionary study group we read the appointed readings for today, beginning with the description of the new creation found in the 65th chapter of the prophet Isaiah. It is a poetic and moving portrayal of the new heaven and the new earth about to be created by God, and the new Jerusalem which shall be “as a joy and its people as a delight.” In it, there shall no more be heard the sound of weeping or the cry of distress. Infants will not die and the old shall live out a lifetime. Those who build houses will inhabit them, and those who plant vineyards shall eat their fruit. No one shall build and another inhabit or plant and another eat. No one shall labor in vain or bear children for calamity. And yes, the wolf and the lamb shall feed together and the lion shall eat straw like an ox. They shall not hurt or destroy on all God’s holy mountain.

After reading the passage, the lectionary study group fell silent. Judy broke the silence and said, “This is a hard passage to hear.” She had in mind present-day Jerusalem and the whole of Israel-Palestine. Jordie Gerson, a Jewish student at Harvard Divinity School, recently spent time in both Palestine and Israel where she met persons from both sides of the conflict. After her experience, she said that her despair had been transformed into hope because she had met so many who desire peace. Then, she writes,

This hope will come and go like the Jerusalem sun, more often present, but too often not. I wake in the mornings after Arafat’s death to the sound of choppers circling, and gunshots in

the distance. Terror seems inevitable, death a specter, always waiting, and not too far away.

- *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*
Winter 2007, p. 37

In our lectionary study group we spoke of the Jerusalem of today and how far it is removed from Isaiah's prophetic vision of the new creation. Then, we shared with each other that it is not only Jerusalem that falls short of Isaiah's vision. Indeed, it is our whole world, including our own island community. Houselessness, hunger, deprivation – these are everyday realities for people, right here. Children are born for calamity, right here. For one thing, we continue to send them off to a senseless and immoral war. Stephen Write, the editorial page editor of the San Jose Mercury News and his wife, both opposed to the war, recently bade farewell to their son, whom they love and support, and who had been called up to be among the new troops President Bush has ordered to be in Iraq.

Standing just outside the security line, my wife and I took turns hugging and kissing our son. Tears ran down our cheeks. Reaching into a pocket of his desert fatigues, he grabbed his beret and used it to wipe away his tears. Then my wife and I, with our arms around each other, watched our soldier-son disappear through the gate.

- *Honolulu Advertiser*, March 30, 2007

It's true. The wolf and the lamb are not feeding together. Violence and war remain the everyday reality of millions upon millions of people. Tears are still being shed and the sounds of distress continue to be heard in our world.

Moreover, the earth itself is beginning to suffer more and more from a rampant global warming caused by the human creature. (I trust we will take the time to participate in the Step It Up events this coming weekend). My sisters and brothers, we do live in a Good Friday world. This is a basic truth of the life of our world.

It is also a truth of our own lives. As your pastor, I know all too well what so many of us face in our lives. We live with stories that are heart-breaking and difficult to reconcile. We live with an abiding "dis-ease" of

mind, body, and spirit. We live in despair much of the time, with shattered hopes and unfulfilled expectations. These are the realities of our lives.

Today we dare speak the truth of our lives and the life of our world. Surely, there is no better day than Easter Sunday to speak the truth. On this day, we announce that “Christ is risen; he is risen, indeed!” Yet, the nagging despair in our own lives and our knowledge of the world around us tell us that it may not be so.

Now, it’s not easy to be honest on Easter Sunday. We live in such a beautiful place. We belong to such a wonderful church community. We have so many remembrances of Easter mornings of old, watching the sun rise, and Easter eggs, and new Easter clothes, and going to church, and singing “Love’s redeeming work is done / Fought the fight, the battle won / Death in vain forbids Christ rise / God has opened paradise / Soar we now where Christ has led / Following our exalted head / Made like Christ, like Christ we rise / Ours the cross, the grave, the skies.” Perhaps it is true. Perhaps that Good Friday world we speak of is an illusion. But reality sets in and we know in our hearts that it is otherwise.

It’s comforting to know that our ambivalent feelings are supported by scripture. This morning, we heard the account of the empty tomb from the Gospel of Luke. You will recall how that account ends. “But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.” This sounds like a wonderful completion to the story. Yet, many ancient manuscripts do not include this verse and it is widely accepted by teachers of scripture that it was added to the original account. Luke’s original account of the empty tomb, including the news of the resurrection announced by the two men in dazzling clothes, likely ended on an unsettling note. Luke says that for the women, the news of the resurrection announced by the two men in dazzling clothes “seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.” So ends the story, at least at this point in the gospel.

My friends, Easter morning is not a completion but a beginning. It is not a solution but an unsettling challenge. It is not a fulfillment but a promise. It is not an answer but an invitation. It is not the completion of a story but a new chapter in that same story of Jesus who journeyed to a cross. It is not a solution to the harsh and tragic reality of Good Friday, but a challenge to face our Good Friday world as well as receive the good news of

the resurrection with all the strength and courage and insight we can muster. Nor is Easter morning the fulfillment of the new creation but a promise that in the end all will be well. It is not an answer to our deepest longings but an invitation to live in the midst of this world with faith and with hope, even knowing, as Jordie Gerson has said, that our “hope will come and go.” And let us also remember that hope is not fulfillment – otherwise it would not be hope, and faith is not sight – otherwise it would not be faith.

In truth, we are a Saturday people. Christ is both our death and our life, as the choir sang just before this sermon. We find ourselves in between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Yes, we are, in truth, a Saturday people. As we journey forth, we carry with us, on the one hand, the reality of Good Friday, and on the other hand, the hope we have been given by the grace of God in the raising of Jesus from the dead.

As followers of Jesus the Christ, we cannot fully succumb to the reality of Good Friday. We cannot totally give ourselves over to its truth, for to do so would be to live life without meaning, without purpose, and in constant despair. Nor can we fully lose ourselves in an Easter message that says, optimistically, that Good Friday, in spite of appearances, has been completely overcome. We cannot simply put on a happy face and say that the world’s despair and our own despair count for nothing.

We are a Saturday people. We live, holding both Good Friday and Easter Sunday in our hearts. We live, knowing all too well that all is not right with the world and our lives, but we also live in the faith and hope that is given birth on Easter morning.

And so, my brothers and sisters, it is appropriate and honest that on the Day of Easter we should tell the truth about our world and our lives. The reality of Good Friday can never be far from us. Yet, it is also appropriate that we should also proclaim with our voices and our lives that Christ is risen. His resurrection can mean our resurrection too. His resurrection enables us to move through our Good Friday world with a measure of grace and courage and faith and hope. Let us together, then, proclaim the good news of this day.

Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia!