

Church of the Crossroads
Easter Sunday
March 23, 2008
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THE DIFFERENCE EASTER MAKES

Isaiah 65:17–25
Psalm 118:1–2, 14–24
Matthew 28:1–10

Christ is risen!
Christ has risen indeed!
Alleluia!

“Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell the brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” —Mt 28:10

The title of this morning’s sermon is “The Difference Easter Makes.” Before we consider the difference Easter makes, however, it may be helpful to consider the difference Easter *does not make*. This may best be explored by stating what Easter is *not*.

For one thing, Easter is not a covering over of the reality of the cross. I remember those times when Easter worshipers would completely cover a wooden cross by pinning or taping flowers on it. The cross that has been such a visible symbol in the services of Holy Week, beginning with Palm Sunday, remains before us, to the side now, but it is still there, and it is also bare. Easter does not cover over Good Friday. In many respects, we still live in a Good Friday world, a world filled with injustice and enmity, violence and bloodshed, and underneath it all, a sense of hopelessness. Easter is a response to the hopelessness, but it does not wipe out the realities that give rise to the hopelessness.

Again, Easter, certainly, takes away the *sting* of death, thanks be to God, but Easter does not cover over death or even defeat it. Easter is not an answer to the reality of death in the world and in our lives. Easter is not a solution to the world’s ills.

Somehow, the conventional words we have long associated with Easter fall flat and false—words, or variations on words, such as *victory*,

triumph, conquer, and defeat. In terms of our Easter hymns and anthems, we have almost managed to choose ones that do not contain these words, with one exception, our opening hymn:

Jesus Christ is risen today,
Our triumphant holy day. Alleluia!

Easter is neither a solution nor a definitive answer to the reality of Good Friday. What, then, is the difference that Easter makes?

May I suggest this morning that we can perhaps consider the difference that Easter makes in terms of a *movement*—a movement from one set of human conditions and experiences to another. Easter moves us from one way of being to another, and this is the difference Easter makes.

Within this movement, there are three sub-movements that come to mind, and they are suggested in the text I have chosen for this sermon:

But the angel said to the [women], “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

First, there is the movement *from despair to hope*. Before the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, despair was the lot of the women and the disciples. After the resurrection, there was hope. As I shared last night at the vigil, the real situation we face in our lives and in the life of the world is the loss of hope. We have come to believe that life cannot change, that it doesn't matter who occupies the White House, that there will always be injustice, war, and bloodshed in the earth, and that we are powerless to do anything about it. In the face of the loss of such hope, we have retreated from the world and have occupied ourselves with our own security and well-being. We have “hunkered down,” so to speak. The dearth of hope we experience is matched by the open hopelessness and despair of the hungry and homeless of the earth, and the despair of the earth itself.

With the resurrection, there is the possibility of hope being reawakened within us. Now, as Douglas Hall has reminded us, hope is not fulfillment, or completion. We hope for that which we cannot see. But hope does point us to a future fulfillment of that for which we long. Hope focuses us upon the promises of God. Hope points us to that new heaven and that new earth envisioned by the prophet Isaiah, towards that time when there

shall be no longer the cry of distress or the sound of weeping in the earth, that time when all will live life to its fullest, when they shall build houses and inhabit them, and plant vineyards and eat their fruit, when they shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity. And yes,

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain, says the Lord. —Is 65:25

Easter invites us to leave behind our despair and our cynicism, and live in hope. Secondly, Easter invites us to move *from isolation to community*. “Go, tell *my brothers* to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” Jesus calls the disciples “his brothers.” For our lectionary study group last Monday, this was an aspect of the story we had not noted before. Jesus calls the disciples, the same ones who had deserted him “his brothers.” Imagine that. He calls them back to community, to the community of brothers and sisters. Their isolation from him, and even from one another, was to be no more. They would be together again.

We are reminded that the resurrection was the experience of a community, not isolated individuals. The resurrection is at its core the testimony not of isolated individuals but of a community that came to believe that Jesus was in some mysterious way alive in them and among them, and we can be that community. Good Friday has the power of separating us from one another, rendering us hopeless and powerless, but Easter can bring us together, empowering us to do together what cannot be done separately, and that is to live the new life God grants. Easter has the capacity to connect us once again, and what a difference this can make in our lives. For now we know that we need not face our Good Friday world alone but that we can face it in solidarity with one another and together work together to affirm life in the midst of the death that surrounds us.

This leads me to name a third movement made possible by Easter, and this is the movement from *fear to discipleship*. “Do not be afraid,” Jesus said to the women, “Go and tell the brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” Easter is an invitation to let go of our fear, the fear that defines our life these days, and to go off to Galilee, for that is where we will see Jesus. Galilee is the place, away from Jerusalem, away from the seat of religious

and political power, where Jesus carried out his prophetic ministry in the first place. Following the resurrection, it's back to Galilee—not back to fishing as usual, but to discipleship, to carry on the ministry Jesus began. It is in Galilee, in the world, that the work of discipleship is carried out; it is in the world that resurrection is practiced, not in fear, but in freedom. Now you know why I had Terry read that wonderful poem, *Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front*, by Wendell Berry as part of this Easter Festival Service. The “mad farmer” invites us to leave our secure and fearful and controlled world behind, and “every day do something that won't compute.”

. . . Love the Lord.

*Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.
Denounce the government and embrace
the flag. Hope to live in that free
republic for which it stands.*

“Ask questions that have no answers.” “Plant sequoias.”

*Put your faith in two inches of humus
that will build under the trees
every thousand years.
Listen to carrion – put your ear
close, and hear the faint chattering
of the songs that are to come.*

“Laugh.” “Be joyful though you have considered all the facts.”

*Go with your love to the fields.
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head
in her lap. Swear allegiance
to what is nighest your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.*

Practice resurrection.

Practice resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead means your resurrection and my resurrection, too. Let us then go to Galilee to meet the risen Jesus. Let us say yes to hope. Let us seek out brothers and sisters in community and then let go of fear and say yes to discipleship.

Easter is not an answer—a solution—but an invitation—an invitation to move from despair to hope, isolation to community, and fear to discipleship. This is the difference Easter can make. For Christ is risen! He has risen indeed! Alleluia!