

Great Feast of the Resurrection
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, TX
4 April 2021

Mark 16:1-8 and John 20: 1-8

When they look at him dying on the cross, the Pharisees and Temple Priests feel great relief. Jesus, the troublemaker, the heretic, the threat to the Jewish Orthodoxy, the revolutionary preacher, the harsh critic of the abuses at the temple has gone. Crucified, humiliated, defeated. They had seen this before and almost felt sympathy for the deluded preachers who often wandered into Jerusalem, like flies into a spiderweb. Jerusalem was a great place for martyrs. They had seen this many times before. Now they can breathe a sigh of relief at least for a while, they are victorious, and they deserve to celebrate this Passover with more gratitude than any other Passover in recent history.

Pilate was relieved as well. Jerusalem was a powder keg of insurrection. He hated these Jews with all their rigid customs, their strange food practices, their obsessive washing and cleansing, and their atheism. He knew that any person who did not worship all the Roman Gods, and Caesar was an atheist. When this Jesus stepped into Jerusalem, he probably was unaware of how much the people of this city hate those who are different, those who do not follow all their rules, those have a different view of God. Pilate is relieved because he has failed to keep the peace in other cities and the Emperor is beginning to lose his patience with him. Even though he did not believe this Jesus was guilty of anything, he sent him to death anyway to protect his job, to secure his power, and to stay on the good graces of the Jews. Who cares anyway? This Jesus was a nobody. No one would remember him come Monday morning. He knew the Jews well. They were nothing but trouble.

Many in the crowds were sad for this Jesus whom they liked well enough when he entered Jerusalem. But times are hard, and the Temple Police had spies everywhere. When one of their spies comes and tells you, "When the time comes, all you need to do is shout crucify him, crucify him. He is a nobody anyway and we need him gone. Be our friend! We will not forget your kindness." What can a man do? This Jesus was a fake anyway. When he came in on Sunday, they thought he was a revolutionary who would call all his friends to arms and finally show these Romans a thing or two. They were ready to go home and pick up their weapons, but the bugle calls never came. Jesus started talking mysteriously about his death and calling himself the Son of God. That is when they knew he was crazy. Who else but a crazy man would preach this kind of teaching with all the spies of the Temple Police around? Who cares anyway? Come the next day there would be another preacher to take his place. These were difficult times and difficult times always seem to give birth to all sorts of prophets and teachers. Come Monday, no one would remember him. He was a nobody like they themselves were nobodies!

When the Disciples saw Jesus dying in the cross, they felt extremely sad, depressed, and filled with fear. They had been seen with Jesus. It would be a matter of time before they came for them. Many of them were hiding at Mary's house, many were hiding outside the city. What a mess this whole thing had become! Of course, they should have known what was coming. After all, Jesus had been talking about his death for months now. He said this was the only way to fulfill the Scriptures. He said his death was necessary. He said unless he died none of them would have eternal life with God. It all sounded so macabre, but they all secretly hoped that Peter would be able to talk some sense into him. They were best friends and Peter and Jesus loved each other greatly. But even Peter was unable to stop what happened! They felt so disheartened! They had such hopes for this Jesus! They thought he was the one who would liberate Israel. But now he was dead! The only thing they can do is go back home!

For most of these people and many others, the story of Jesus of Nazareth ended on that Friday we call "Good". But of course, you and I know differently. We know that on Sunday Morning, Jesus rose from the dead victorious. The forces of intolerance were no match for him. The forces of political convenience were no match for him. The forces of apathy and cowardice were no match for him. The powers of sin were no match for him. He rose victorious, breaking through the boulders of humanity's inhumanity. He has risen and now death lies as a defeated enemy. He has risen and now the narrative of human life has an eternal chapter to be written one day in God's own presence. He is risen and has become Good News for those who suffer persecution, injustice, false incarceration, torture, and poverty around the globe. He has become good news for the captive. He has become good news for those without a voice. He has become Good News for those who are chained by depression, addiction, bitterness, and mourning. He has risen and his resurrection is good news for the weak, the hopeless, and those who feel abandoned by God. He is risen, and he has become Good News even for us here today.

Jesus risen from the dead remains a challenge for those in power, he remains a challenge for those who exploit and abuse their brothers and sisters, he remains a challenge for those who feel superior to their brothers and sisters, he remains a constant reminder to oppressive powers around the world that oppression will never have the last say, that their time is limited, that they too will one day be judged. Jesus, risen for us today, is a visible sign that God is on the side of the those who suffer, he is on the side of those who are persecuted, he is on the side of those who walk in the valley of the shadow of death.

Christ risen is a challenge to our complacency, our apathy, our arrogance, and our inhumanity. Christ risen introduces a new creation and invites us to become a new creation. Last night at the Great Vigil we renewed our baptismal vows as we celebrated the baptism of Lane Johanna Cooper. We reaffirmed our renunciation of evil and renewed our commitment to Jesus Christ. We promised to continue in the apostles teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers. We promised to resist evil, and, whenever we fall into sin, repent, and return to the Lord. We pledged to

proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ and to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves. Finally, we promised to strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being. This, my friends, is what it means to be resurrected people. It means that we will pursue a relationship with God. It means that we will resist evil, treat others with dignity and strive to live in justice and peace. Can you imagine a world where all strive for justice and peace, a world where all people respect the dignity of every human being, a world where the only pre-condition to treat others with utmost respect and compassion is the fact that they are created by God in his image? A world where we love others for who they are regardless of political position, church affiliation, culture differences, or social standing?

This is in fact the world that Christ calls us today to create. The sad truth is that many around the world reject Christ not because they are unwilling to believe that he is the way, the truth, and the life, but because of the lifestyle and behaviors of those who profess themselves to be his followers. If we were to live as Christ calls us today to live our churches would be filled, our cities would prosper in peace, and our world would be free of the darkness of genocide, war, and famine.

I pray today that you will return to the Lord. I know that many of you come to see us just once a year and I am glad for your visit. But today I pray that you will allow Christ to come into your heart. Today I pray that God will tear down the walls of separation between you and him. I know that many of these walls have been built because of behaviors of priests and others who call themselves Christians and I apologize on their behalf. But, my friends, I am convinced that only Christ can bring joy into our lives. I pray that today you will welcome him as your Lord and Savior. He is risen. He is alive. And he longs for a relationship with you. I pray that you will let him in today. Only he can bring wholeness and restoration to your life. Amen!