

## EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 4, 2021

There is a 1600 year old tradition that every Easter should start with a joke. This tradition is known as Risus Paschalis and it has a good theological foundation as it recognizes that God has the last laugh by raising Jesus from the dead. So here goes.

A Jewish couple and their mother-in-law went on vacation to Jerusalem. The mother-in-law was known to be quite obstinate, opinionated, and frankly quite a miserable person who never had anything nice to say about anyone. While they were there, the mother-in-law unexpectedly passed away. The funeral director told them "You can have her body shipped home but it will be quite expensive. It will cost at least \$5,000, or you can bury her here, in the Holy Land, for \$150." They thought about it and finally the man told him he would just have her body shipped home. The funeral director was surprised and said, "Really, you would spend \$5,000 to ship her body home, when it would be wonderful to bury her here in this holy place and only cost you only \$150?" The man replied, "You see, it's like this. 2000 years ago, a man died here, was buried here, and three days later he rose from the dead..... "I just can't take that chance"

For Mary Magdalene who arrived at the tomb that morning the empty tomb seemed like a bad joke. Where was Jesus? Where was his body? What happened? Confusion, fear took hold of her and she ran to get Peter. After Peter and the beloved disciple saw the empty tomb, Mary stayed behind as she was still grief stricken, bewildered and terrified trying to figure out what happened and what to do.

It is hard for us today to grasp the enormity of what Mary encountered. For us today, Easter has become a part of our DNA like knowing the earth is round. It is kind of ho hum – oh yea – it's Easter. So what? So, the question for all of us is what does resurrection mean to you other than it being something that's celebrated once a year?

A rector in this diocese many years ago accepted the challenge of going to a church which had an attendance of about 10 - 15 on a Sunday. He was told he could either close it or grow it. When he was asked if he was worried about growing the church when he first went there, he replied, "Nah, You know, when I first got there, this place was so close to death, you could smell the resurrection."

Think about that for a moment. 'So close to death, you can smell the resurrection.' What do you think resurrection smells like? Well, it smells like the air does after a heavy snow storm. Even though everything is covered by a thick blanket of snow you know that this snow storm has not had the last word. Spring will come again, and with it will come the signs of new life: buds on trees, and crocus struggling to push through the ground that has been hardened by winter.

What does resurrection smell like? It smells like the first new house you bought, after all the papers were signed and you could imagine them filled with furniture and the people you love.

Resurrection smells like the waiting room of a hospital after the doctor comes in and says that the operation, she performed on your loved one was a complete success and your beloved will make a complete recovery.

Those are the smells of resurrection. The promise of Spring. The Renewal of life. Relief and Gratitude. These are the bouquets of hope. You see hope has an aromatic odor all its own. It is the smell of resurrection and it smells like love and joy and hope, a fragrance far surpassing the beauty of lilies.

However, we, like Mary, at that tomb long ago, also have the responsibility to recognize the resurrection in us and bring that good news to others. It is now our responsibility to tell the world to wake up! Smell the resurrection in the air! But how do we do that? How do we let others, including ourselves, know and understand the full impact of how the resurrection affects us?

There is a poem written by Gerard Manley Hopkins titled, "The Wreck of the Deutschland," which is about a shipwreck in 1875 off the coast of England where 160 people died. Hopkins wrote the poem trying to make sense of the inhumanity of the rescuers who waited far too long to launch a rescue and then stole jewelry from the dead. He was appalled at their callousness and was overwhelmed with the horror of what happened. This tragedy sounds like the kind of thing we too often hear about in our news today too. The first part of the poem is about the sinking of the ship but then Hopkins turns his attention to Jesus. He writes about the hope of resurrection being so much stronger than the moments of darkness and tragedy in our world. He prays that the light and love of the risen Christ would spill into everyone's life. And then he wrote, "Let him Easter in us." Let him Easter in us! Easter—not as a day, or a noun, but as a verb, an action. Let him Easter in us.

This transforms Easter into something that is always changing; is always new and unpredictable. It's describing the Easter event as not something that happened 2,000 years ago, or at the end of our days. It's something that gives us new life and hope now.

The truth of the Easter story for all of us is something that happens in us. Easter is a verb. The good news of Easter is not simply that God has raised Christ from the dead. The good news of Easter is also about the possibility and the promise that is available to each one of us also. Yes, God has raised Christ from the dead and we can claim this new energy and make it our own.

"Let him Easter in us." In fact, I think this is a great way to look at the real truth, the transforming reality of Easter. Let Easter get into us. Let Easter come and live where we live. Let Easter permeate our souls. If we let that happen then others will be able to smell the resurrection. It's the smell of hope, love, forgiveness, possibility. Isn't that really what we all desire the most? Not Easter as a noun, or a long-ago event. But, rather, Easter as a verb, as something that revolutionizes our present lives, as something that gives us new purpose now, as something that gives us hope and meaning and courage. Isn't that what every human heart longs for? Let him Easter in us!

It does seem like in so many ways, people are longing for an experience of Easter in their lives. How about the families who have had a loved one die from Covid or the many people who lost their jobs and fear the ability to find a new one during this pandemic? What about those who can't put food on their tables. What about those whose lives have been devastated by racial injustice and gun violence. What about those whose lives have been torn apart by tornados in the south, fires in the west? In so many ways, so many people are longing for God to Easter in us, so we can see and show that life giving love that combats the darkness around us.

You know when Mary arrived at the tomb early on that first Easter morning she also needed to experience Easter as a verb. She came to the tomb thinking that the story had ended. Mary came smelling death and that it was all over between Jesus and his followers. What she initially got and experienced was Easter as a noun, but eventually Mary experienced Easter as a verb because she smelled the resurrection and ceased to

be afraid. Eventually the other disciples came to the realization that Christ had been raised from the dead. Jesus Eastered in them and they were changed from a group of terrified people, who were frightened and fearful, to apostles, to people who boldly went forth and proclaimed the good news that because Christ is risen life is stronger than death, love is stronger than hate, and God's peace is more powerful than human violence.

When we recognize Easter as a verb, it is something that happens in us too. Easter is about the possibility and the promise that this new life of grace, forgiveness and love is available to each one of us out of whatever hurt, despair and tragedy we experience. Easter is calling us to run and risk, laugh and dance, sing and hurry and claim this new life in Christ and make it our own.

So, right now, right here, at this moment, let Easter get into us; let Easter come and live where we live; let Easter permeate our souls. Smell the resurrection and feel the power of God's love in our risen Christ.

Alleluia! Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!