

Rev Sally's Sermon
The Sunday of the Resurrection:
Easter Sunday- April 4, 2021

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Christ is risen! I've wanted to say this for so long! "Alleluia" is the Greek word for "Praise the Lord". Praise the Lord for all the health care workers who have cared for so many. Praise the Lord for the teachers and school employees who are making sure our children continue to learn despite hardships. Praise the Lord for the vaccines! Praise the Lord for the decrease on new infections. Praise the Lord for all of you, and for getting you through all you've endured this year. Praise the Lord that his life is stronger than death!

Last year on the fourth Sunday of Lent, when we ceased worship in the nave, I was expecting to at least be back together by Easter. Then when that didn't happen, I hoped for an Easter celebration at some point during the 50 days of Easter. But as you know, that didn't happen either. The entire season of Easter was streamed virtually over the internet. I know I don't have to recount for you what has happened over the last year. You know it as well as I do. And we each have had our own unique personal struggles in the midst of this pandemic. I think for me the toughest part has been the isolation – being alone. As I look back, I realize that I have felt like I was in a dark cave, similar to the tomb in which Jesus' body was laid. In the midst of darkness, I have known confusion, fear, and the grief of death.

This is what Mary felt on that early morning as she went to Jesus' tomb to mourn her friend. She also was filled with confusion, with fear and with grief over her friend's death. At first, she was confused by the open tomb. So, she turned to the other disciples for help. But they didn't have the answers either, other than to confirm that the tomb was indeed empty. But after they left, Mary remained, weeping for her friend. But then another man appeared. Perhaps the darkness of the tomb against the brightness of the daylight kept her from seeing any detail in this figure, just a dark shadow. "Sir, if you have carried him away. Tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away," Mary pleaded. But then the man spoke her name. "Mary". And she recognized this stranger in the voice that had spoken her name so many times before. In that moment she knew the truth. Jesus was risen.

I have always been especially drawn to this particular story of the resurrection. I think it's because I identify with Mary. She is so human. Scholars who write about these things talk about the faithfulness of the "other" disciple, the one who saw the empty tomb and believed. But I identify with Mary, the one overwhelmed with grief, fear, loneliness. And Jesus honored this. He provided what she needed. He came to her and spoke her name. In that moment, she knew the truth, her Lord, her Rabbouni, was alive.

This good news is for us also. Though we have been entombed for a year, we are now starting to see the light. Death is being transformed by life. Though we may still feel anxious, if we will listen, we will hear our Risen Lord call us by name, sharing his life with us.

But that's not the end of the story. Jesus didn't tell Mary to keep this good news to herself. He told her to go and share it with the other disciples. And she did. "I have seen the Lord!" she proclaimed. We too can share this good news. We can help others see the light of God's life in our world. We do this when we serve those in need. We do this when we listen to the lonely. We do this when we tell others about how Jesus' life has transformed our own.

Today on the Church calendar, we not only celebrate Easter, but today is also the Feast Day for the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In the Church, we remember people, not on the date of their birth, but on the date of their mortal death, the date they entered God's nearer presence. 53 years ago, Dr. King was assassinated. He lived his life in such a way that he shared the risen life of Jesus with the world. He let nothing stop him, not confusion, not fear, not even the risk of death. He trusted that the life of Jesus was stronger than death. And through this faith, he shared the good news of the resurrected Jesus.

Today the good news is that death does not have the final word. Though we have experienced the worst many of us will ever know, death has not won. The life of God is stronger. We know this because Christ is Risen! – Alleluia!