

Sermon for Easter Sunday
RCL Lectionary, Year B
April 11th, 2009

The Episcopal Church of Our Saviour
Mill Valley, California

Easter Perfection

by The Rev. Richard E. Helmer

Alleluia, Christ is Risen! *Christ is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!*

There's a Church calendar in the parish office that has a cartoon with "The Lord is Risen!" in one panel. On the other, it says, "The Clergy is dead." But given all the effort that makes this day all the more beautiful, the sentiment is not only confined to clergy. We could say "The Altar Guild is dead. . . The Choir is dead. . . The musicians are hanging on by their very last thread. . ." or we could talk of so many of you scrambling get ready to host Easter dinners, working so hard to get your children out of bed and here, dressed in their Easter best, struggling to say the Alleluia's of Easter even when the world is saying anything but, "Alleluia," right now. . . Well, that's just it, isn't it? Christ is Risen, but we feel wiped out at times. . . not ready for Easter, not ready, and nowhere near our best.

We are apt to forget in our desire for a perfect Easter (right up there with our desire at the other end of the year for a perfect Christmas) that we are not the ones to make Easter "perfect." Rather, it is Easter that is given to perfect *us*. To make us whole again. To renew us. To breathe new life into our souls and transform us from the inside out. To make an end of the world of death and usher in the kingdom of life. To cleanse us from stem to stern, top to tail, and even to re-make the universe yet again. And not make us perfect as we would be perfect, but as God would have us: saved in the image of Christ Jesus, passionate, resolved, our true authentic selves made in the image of the Divine, freed from fear and the sins that have enslaved us, free to rise up again.

It's a tall order, isn't it? One only God can make in us. So Easter, the Resurrection, is God's gift to us, offered whether we or ready or not. Just as it was offered, ready or not, for the first followers of Jesus, surprised at the door of the empty tomb.

Mark's Gospel in some of the most ancient manuscripts ends right where we just heard it end today, with terror and amazement filling the three women who had beheld the cross from afar and then showing up at the tomb on Sunday morning. They had come to Jesus' grave expecting what human beings normally expect after a few days: a stinking body, a heavy stone barring the way like a lid on a carved sarcophagus or the earth covering the coffin. The inertia of death should have set in, with its inexorable march towards entropy, the weight of decay having taken hold as the universe is set – so we are told – to run down like a clock one day.

But the stone was rolled back and the body was gone, and the message was that Christ had risen and gone on ahead. . . a crazy message, counterintuitive in the extreme, a shock to everything that was expected in the grief that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome must have shared. Their emotional and intellectual apple carts were overturned. Nothing, now, made sense.

This is the story of Resurrection, and it ends here so we can pick it up. Like the ancient Christian communities that first heard this gospel narrative, we are left to wonder in amazement and perhaps a little terror at a God who overturns death. . . in truth, a God who upends the very fear and power that drives so much of the world. Easter tells us that fear of death is ended. Now, if you must fear something, fear Resurrection. Fear new life. Be amazed at the power of a God who owns even death now. Hell's gates are broken. Evil's days are numbered. Hope and Love now reign supreme in the human family and will forever and ever amen.

With all the sorrows we have shouldered this long Lent – and it has been long as the world has so clearly suffered it with us – the light of divine Spring now shines into our midst and will never leave. The worm is turning. . . away from the Body now made anew. We stand as an Easter people, borne on this Good News, without being expected to fully understand or even understand any better than the three women at the tomb. But the Risen Christ has now gone on ahead of us to prepare the way. . . to welcome us into the promises that were always on his lips. . . and we have become, in our baptism, part of Christ, and so, therefore, part of this New Life.

So, my sisters and brothers, this Eastertide, do not seek your own notions of perfection, but the perfection that is only made in you by the Risen Christ, wrought with the power of the cross. . . the new life that has rolled away the stone that has blocked our hearts from being renewed. Share in the abundant love that flows from this message and watch out for a world transformed and renewed beyond your wildest imaginings. It has already begun. . . And, at last say with me, "Christ is Risen. . . And so am I!"

Blessings and love to all of you this Eastertide.

Amen.