

Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18

Easter Day – Year A – April 16, 2017

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The Easter story in John’s gospel is rich in so many ways. Mary Magdalene finds the tomb of Jesus empty and runs to tell her friends. She was the first to proclaim the resurrection—a woman who was not ordained and did not take any seminary courses. She came to the tomb and saw that it was empty and went and told the others. Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed!

The story powerfully reveals how different people are when they hear something important—something so important and so amazing. Mary ran to tell the others who had to see for themselves. Peter and the beloved disciple also ran to the tomb to see. The beloved disciple did not go into the tomb at first—he looked in and saw the burial clothes. Peter arrived and went into the tomb where he saw the burial clothes and noticed that the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head had been “rolled up in a place by itself.” (John 20:7). It was only after Peter went into the tomb that the beloved disciple also went in, and he saw and believed. Then they both went home.

Mary had followed them back to the tomb and remained there weeping. She stayed outside of the tomb. Her grief allowed her to remain weeping as she looked inside. It was then that she saw the two angels sitting where Jesus had been. They asked her why she was weeping and so began a dialogue with the angels. She turned around and saw Jesus and yet did not recognize him. There must have been

desperation in her voice as she asked where Jesus had been taken. Jesus called Mary by name and it was only then that she recognized him. He sent her to proclaim to the others, “I have seen the Lord.” (John 20:18). She is the first to tell the story.

As human beings we all have different ways of understanding. People often see the same thing and tell the story differently from their own perspective or their own belief. Resurrection is what we celebrate this day, and resurrection is not something that we naturally understand. Frederick Buechner attempts to explain it this way. “All of the major Christian creeds affirm belief in resurrection *of the body*. In other words, they affirm the belief that what God in spite of everything prizes enough to bring back to life is not just some disembodied echo of human beings but a new and revised version of all the things which made them the particular human beings they were and which they need something like a body to express: their personality, the way they looked, the sound of their voice, their peculiar capacity for creating and loving, in some sense their *faces*.... The idea of the resurrection of the body is based on the experience of God’s unspeakable love.”¹

This week our bishops, Ian and Laura, sent an Easter message to the Episcopal Church in CT, and was entitled “Practice Resurrection.” They cited

¹ Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 51-52.

Wendell Berry's poem "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front" where the reader is invited to "practice resurrection." Practicing resurrection is about living boldly the new life Jesus wills for us—the new Jesus way of living. "We're invited to practice sharing the love, forgiveness and healing love that God offers to us" in Jesus Christ.

This week's reflection from the Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner through the *Living Compass Wellness Initiative* is also about practicing resurrection. I'm hearing this notion of practicing resurrection now three times in the span of one week, and I want to pass that along to you on this Easter Day. Stoner talks about how one can believe in something so strongly and yet not practice it. Believing in the resurrection is one thing and practicing it is yet another dimension. Stoner says, "What does it mean to practice the resurrection? ... Resurrection shares the same root as the word resurgent, both pointing to life surging and reemerging where previously there had been no life. I think any of us practice resurrection whenever we do the following: forgive, love, and serve others."²

Think about the ways that Jesus taught those early disciples and us: loving God and loving neighbor as we love ourselves, loving our enemies, forgiving or asking for forgiveness, giving ourselves generously to another in need. Stoner and our bishops invite us to practice our faith in new life by helping to make a change

² The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner, "Practicing Resurrection" in *The Living Compass Wellness Initiative*, April 14, 2017.

in the world around us—to bring about the new life that is in us and to share it with those around us.

We have journeyed through the events of Jesus' last days this past week and today we rejoice in his resurrection. In resurrection we are given the precious gift of new life, and we're invited to share that with others—to take this new way of living out. Just like Mary Magdalene we're to tell our friends and to practice this Good News in our own lives. Go and practice resurrection.

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