

A Sermon by the Reverend Mother Crystal J. C. Hardin

Easter Sunday (Year A)

Sunday, April 12, 2020

Jeremiah 31:1-6

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Acts 10:34-43

John 20:1-18

For the first time in five weeks, I am standing in the sanctuary of our beloved church. She remains visibly empty; but she is also, somehow, full. Full of the words of peace shared between us. Of the laughter of our children. Of the tears of those who have grieved in her pews. Of the bonds between us. Of the vows made at this altar and at our font. Of beginnings and ends; ends and beginnings. They are all here. Somehow, you are all here, a great cloud of witnesses who have painted the walls of Christ Church with the prayers of her people. I hold you all in my heart.

And so, it is with my deepest affection and most resolute faith, that I say to you now:

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

We say this, of course, on Easter, and yet it is a truth that we, as Christians, live by always. At this time, for all time.

It is a truth pronounced in the midst of joyful celebrations, but it is also a truth uttered at bedsides, in hospital rooms, and at gravesides.

“Yes, all we go down to the dust; yet even at the grave we make our song: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.” (Book of Common Prayer, 483).

Christ is risen!

It remains true regardless of how we approach it. Whether we woke up today joyful, healthy or hopeful; sick, fearful or weary. Whether we woke up in the Easter frame of mind or unable to shake the dust of Lent from our feet, the resurrection truth has been, is, and will always remain the same: Alleluia! Christ is risen!

And yet, many of us may be grieving, even on Easter morning. And, that's okay. I invite you to remember that first Easter morning. That fateful morning which found

the disciples huddled away in fear and grief, and Mary Magdalene visiting a tomb in the still dark hours of morning. The future, incredibly uncertain. The path they walked in deepest hope seemingly ending in the finitude of death. And Mary, coming to the tomb so that she might anoint the body of Jesus, so that she might physically *be with* him, only to find it empty.

I wonder if we can relate to all of this a bit differently this year. This year when there is no place to go, no work to be done, nothing to grasp in our hands. The whisper of a question laying heavy on some of our hearts, “Will Easter happen without us?”

How are we meant to celebrate Easter from a distance, without the embodied, incarnational actions that seem to make the resurrection present to us? Pastor Emily Scott, author of “For All Who Hunger”¹ and founder of St. Lydia’s Dinner Church in NYC, writes,

“The resurrection, we know, comes anyway. This year I’m remembering that the resurrected Christ didn’t arrive in a crowded room, but to a few people at a time, two by two. A couple of women out before dawn. Men walking a long, empty road. We will find community again. But the resurrection will find us first.”

That, my friends, is grace. The fact that the resurrection will find us. It always does.

I’ll admit to you that I struggled to write this sermon. With what to say. With finding the right words for a moment like this, Easter morning in a time of global pandemic. I wrote three sermons, all while in sweatpants mind you, and none them did what I wanted them to do. Finally, I turned to a colleague and friend. It took her all of five minutes to make me come clean. “I want to make it Easter for them,” I confessed. And, without hesitation, she said, “Girl. You are not Jesus. And you don’t need to be.”

Thanks be to God for her, and for all those people in our lives that tell us the truth.

I am not Jesus. And neither are you. And yet, I am human. We are human.

And, standing here right now, in this pulpit, looking out at empty pews, I am painfully aware of what we are losing this morning. I miss the joyful celebration that is Easter morning at Christ Church. I miss your bodily presence. I miss the music. I miss the Mass, and your outstretched hands at the rail. I miss it all.

¹ <http://www.emilymdscott.com/book>

And yet I am reassured by the words of the prophet Jeremiah spoken to us this Easter morning:

The people who survived the sword
found grace in the wilderness;
when Israel sought for rest,
the Lord appeared to him from afar.
I have loved you with an everlasting love;
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. (31:2-3)

Today we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord. Our celebration may look nothing like what we are accustomed to or what we envisioned. But, perhaps we are being invited into something altogether holy, a chance to find grace in the wilderness, to know the resurrection truth in our lives, the truth that pursues us, and that always finds us first.

I think we've had a taste of it already, in the connections being formed and deepened between us. In the abundance of support and encouragement, and in the vulnerable sharing of fears. In the sacrifices made, the reflections offered, the change embraced. May it always be so.

The people who survived the sword, found grace in the wilderness. That grace, my friends, is the resurrection finding us. Again and again.

Alleluia, Christ is Risen.
The Lord is Risen indeed.
Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.