

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

For three years, they followed Jesus. Gave up everything for him. And, suddenly, he is disgraced, tortured, very publicly dead, and buried behind a huge rock and armed guards. They heard from the cross, "It is finished". And boy, it sure is for them. In shock, and despair, and hopelessness, they wonder and wander..."What is next?" "What do I do now?" "Where do I go?"

Sudden changes, leaving them clueless and scared. Lives filled with fear, facing the unknown.

Are you and I any different? Drastic, sudden, unwelcome changes in our life. A loved one lost to tragedy. Home gets foreclosed. Your job went overseas and left you behind. Catastrophic medical news hits you from left field. All of us wondering and wandering about in shock. Like these faithful followers of Jesus, we...like they....go to a graveyard to mourn an ending. Sometimes a physical graveyard, but most often, a graveyard containing our broken hearts. Our uncertain futures. Our pains and losses.

But, the story on this day...this most blessed day...is that they went on, alright...only to discover a miraculous new beginning. It occurred to each of them at different times, in different ways...which is the lesson to us from the details of today's Gospel reading. But, it is a new beginning for each of them, nonetheless. The apostles did not understand during the life of Jesus. We do not really get it either.

In simple terms, we think that all Jesus was about was the promise of life after death. Throughout his life, he acts and proclaims that he knows God the Father...that he knows the Heart of God. But, when he was asked if there was life after death, his reply was essentially, "I do not know if there is life after death. The real question is...is their life **before** death?" **Is there life before death?**

Sure, he was terrified before going to the cross. He saw crucifixions before. Imagine his heart sickness and fear in the garden just before being arrested...knowing of certain death...but not knowing, not being certain at all, of what would happen to him. The real story of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday is the faith of Jesus in God the Father...going forward into the unknown, through his own valley of the shadow of death. And, as Christians, as "followers of the Way" as they were first named, we are called to have that faith as well. Following Jesus into our own unknown territories, having faith in the God who created us.

And then....in the end, the Resurrection comes. The final and greatest miracle of transformation from God. The Resurrection that came to him. And now, as the Body of Christ, it comes to us as well.

Life before death. Change and renewal, in the here and now. Rebirth. Starting anew. Resurrection. Do you want to see it?

Look around you. I am serious. Look around at the church you know so well. The sanctuary that has been your spiritual home, generations for some here. What do you see? Does it look the same?

Yes, it looks like the sacred worship space at Zion has always looked in recent memory. But, look again. The area around the doorway into Clarke Memorial Hall was cracked and chipped. On the opposite wall, against Washington Street, there were spots of plain plaster patching, painted over in matching color, instead of the stippled, textured plaster wall. And back there, on the east wall, was a large blistering, chalky area caused by a past roof leak that looked worn, tired, embarrassing.

But not anymore. The sanctuary walls have been carefully, delicately, lovingly scraped. Areas re-stippled. With cracks filled with caulk or joint compound. Then painted two coats with the same color as before. Almost three dozen tubes of caulk, 25 gallons of joint compound, and twenty-five gallons of paint later...both this sanctuary, and St. Joseph's Chapel...are fresh, and new, and reborn.

These sacred worship spaces are the same as they were...just as each one of us is the same as we were, but also they are renewed and restored...just in the same way that you and I are also restored and made new by the Resurrection celebrated on this day.

The thing is that is ironic is that you and I loved and enjoyed this sanctuary both then, and now.

In the same way, God loves each of us, both as we were then, and as we are now.

It is really only we humans who notice the difference between then and now. So it is that really we humans who get to revel into and rejoice over the changes that God brings over us when we are willing to claim the life that the Resurrection brings to us. Claim? Does it mean that we are already entitled to something?

If this sounds crazy to you, it is no surprise. Everywhere...in the world around us...we hear "Mankind is evil and has sinned. You, too, are no good. Each one of you...are good for nothing." It is in our news, our entertainment, our conversation. Often, even in our theology, including I bet some pulpits around town today. We have a culture of being scared to death, instead of being raised into life.

But God tells us what? God tells us all that we are. By the very nature of our creation, each human person is **the** best thing God ever made, if we only would get out of God's way and let it happen,. Scripture says so. We are created in God's own image, from the elements that God first imagined, then chose to mold and shape into these human forms. We are God's own, animated by God's own breath. We were created to live creatively, generously, exuberantly, abundantly

Sin is when we do not live that way. We are taught, by the world around us, to live another way. To hide, or suppress, or disregard our living life. We learn to hide, suppress or disregard our mistakes, our emotions, our pains, our dreams, our honest thoughts, our wisdom, our strength, and our fruitful observations...to the point we believe only part of us is holy. And that is where we lose our way.

The Resurrection is really about us moving the other way. The right way. To live into God's intention for humanity to be holy...to be a child of God. The story of the gift from God of the Incarnation of Jesus is a story about living....about playing through life with intentional gratitude...into the image that God told us we could claim as our own. The image of God that we can claim as our own. If we start asking ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?', the response from God is, "Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of mine. Your 'playing small' does not serve the world. Suck it up, and start living now. That is why Jesus made the trip...to lead the way...with a resurrected life."

In a few moments, we will confess our sins. Today, when we get there, confess with me before God how we intentionally live another way; Our **real** sin is:

that we allow ourselves to continue to "fly under the radar" of life;

that we settle for just existing, and turn our backs on the time God gives us to live joyfully;

that we keep open our self-inflicted wounds from guilt, and hesitation, and being afraid, before a wonder so amazing the resurrection of Jesus from the dead;

that we continue to roll the stone back over the door of the tomb, keeping ourselves closed from the light outside;

Is there life before death? Sure there is, as long as we allow it. By the Resurrection of Jesus, God has taken the last fear, our last excuse away. In faith, I know that my spirit...the person "in here" that makes me who I am...will live on after my body is buried in a box. So, what is to worry? What are we waiting for? We have that engraved invitation from God that came at our baptism....so that cannot be it. What is the delay in moving toward faith and joy?

What is the delay? Well, loving friends and children of God, there is no delay any longer in this church. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are in a place....a holy place because the people of this parish, as a group, **are** turning to claim that resurrection. We are beginning to actively dream with God as to how to transform this worship building into a place of serving God's kingdom on earth, and we will hear those dreams on Sunday morning, two weeks from now. Into this place will come the curious, the seekers, the broken-hearted, and the lost. It has been my prayer that we meet their need...our need...the need of the world...right here...for the signs of God's presence in the world. Powerful and engaging, yet gentle and reassuring forces for unity, and healing, and peace....and I believe that those prayers are on the verge of being answered.

In this 21st century, we can..and will...continue to proclaim a Christian faith that engages the public imagination..all through routines of public prayer, hospitality and service. So, on this joyful Easter day, on behalf of the saints of this blessed place of worship....past, present, and future...I say...."Welcome home, at last. When, in your journeys through life, you look for God's comfort, for peace, for quiet...come here, and re-claim the life that God blesses you with."

Welcome your resurrected life. Be like God, and dance through life. Find life before death, and play with gratitude during your time ahead. Dance in communion with others. Dream with the saints who have built this church, maintained it through the decades, and faithfully pray for its future....all in step with the Trinity who dance with each other in the love between God as the Father, and as the Son, and as the Holy Spirit.

Amen.