

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 was for them as well. In shock, 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.

You and I have been there, too. 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. Uncertain future. Pain and loss.

But, they went...only to discover what? A new beginning...that came 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.

They did not understand during the life of Jesus. We really do not get it either. Not at first, if at all.

See this Bible? In simple terms, we tend to 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, by announcing the Kingdom of God. But, Jesus did not talk about life after death.

WE tend to limit the focus of his ministry to that simple, but profound great question....what about life in the afterlife after death of the body? 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? What is THAT?

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 of Jesus does **NOT only** mean that he rose to eternal life...that only he is able to move on because he was such a great guy. Resurrection does not **only** mean that, when we die a physical death, we hope to see our loved ones who passed on before us. It means **way more** than that. If the Resurrection only meant that, then what...on earth...would be the benefit to us, in the here and now??

Forget life after death. Why care about that, especially when you are dead. That is a given of our faith...and you and I cannot control it anyway. So, what does Resurrection mean for us, in the here and now, if anything? Resurrection actually says that **there is life before death**.

What about the world around us? Do you read or hear that there is “life before death”? Here are the headlines from my phone’s Google news just yesterday. Even yesterday:

Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren forceful call for President Trump’s impeachment sets her apart from the crowded primary field of Democratic candidates;

New Jersey Senator Cory Booker’s message of love and unity falls flat as the Democratic base is angry as hell;

former president of the Arizona state senate, Russell Pearce, appears to advocate violence for the United States to save itself, in saying (quote)”It may take the shedding of blood’ (unquote);

President Trump tweets...again....in frustration with details of the Mueller report following its release, following an earlier tweet two days ago which included an expletive to describe portions of the report;

New York State tax revenues plummet by \$3.7 billion, the largest since 9/11;

Business Insider reports that we are altering the climate so severely that we will soon face apocalyptic consequences;

The heiress to the Seagram family fortune pleaded guilty in federal court of creating a secret harem of sex slaves for an upstate New York cult group;

Thirteen people shot dead at a family party in Mexico;

The yellow vest protesters in France return to the streets and riot over the billions pledged to rebuild Notre Dame cathedral in Paris; and

A group calling itself Genesis II Church of Health and Healing plans to convene at a resort in Washington state to promote a (quote) miracle cure (unquote) that claims to cure 95% of all diseases in the world by making adults, children, including infants, drink industrial bleach.

There. How is that on this joyful morning? I actually held back. There is far more that is bleak. But the basic theme of this world...the world in which we live in...is one form or another of this theme:

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, as I am sure some form is being preached somewhere.

We have a culture of being scared to death.

Where do you hear about being raised into life?

Forget the headlines. 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 even 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. We are taught and encouraged to focus on the differences among us, with the fundamental human mimesis of suppressing the other guy in order to raise ourselves. And all of this continues all to the point we come to believe that only part of us is even able to be 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 all of 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, not just existing or brooding through life, but 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.

The world conditions us to start asking ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?' And, the response from God is, "Actually, who are you **not** to be? You are a child of God. Your 'playing small' does not serve the world. 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? If not, why not? 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, in the words of that deep thinking, but mythical theologian, Alfred E. Neuman of Mad Magazine, “What, me 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 delay in moving toward faith and joy?

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.

Into this place come the curious, the seekers, the broken-hearted, and the lost. It is my hope and prayer that we continue to 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.

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 move joyfully. Dance through life. Find life before death, and live...really live with gratitude during your time ahead. Be joyful in communion with others...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.