

The Resurrection of Our Lord [A]

April 5, 2015

Haven Lutheran Church

Readings: Acts 10: 34-43; Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-25; Matthew 28: 1-10

Grace and peace to you from God — Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen

Jesus has been raised from the dead and the earth shook. That's how Matthew describes that first Easter morning. Easter is not crocus rising from the ground or a butterfly coming out of a cocoon or the return of robins or rabbits or eggs — as lovely and magical as they are, they don't make the earth shake. Those are the Easter things we use to celebrate the unexplainable good news of Christ's resurrection and, maybe, make it a little less scary. Matthew and all the gospel writers "strain to describe what happened, but don't make any mistake about it, they're trying to describe something unearthly,¹ something that changes everything. A crucified and dead Jew is no longer dead but loose in the world and in all time. The earth shook and still does.

As William Willimon tells us, "Easter is about God. It is not about the resuscitation of a dead body. That's resuscitation, not resurrection. It's not about the 'immortality of the soul,' some divine spark that endures after the end. That's Plato, not Jesus . . . [Easter is] about God who makes a way when there was no way, a God who makes war on evil until evil is undone, a God who raises dead Jesus" . . . and shows us who's [ultimately] in charge. "On the cross, the world did all it could to Jesus. At Easter, God did all God could to the world. And the earth shook"² It's not something we can explain but a truth that explains us, a truth that grabs hold of us in faith and changes everything. It makes our world shake.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see death in the tomb. To grieve their loss. To pay their respects to Jesus. Perhaps to see to a more proper treatment of the body that would rest in a tomb. Suddenly the earth shook. An angel appeared and rolled back the stone from the tomb. The guards froze in fear and shook like the earth just did. The angel says, "He is not here! ... Come see place where he lay." Be clear – the angel didn't let Jesus out. The angel was letting us in to see that Jesus was already gone. No wonder the angel tells them not to be afraid. The world as these women knew it was forever shaken. They weren't standing at the ending but the beginning of a whole new world: "A world in which resurrection is a reality. A world in which death [does not have the last word]. A world in which Jesus lives forever."³ What all that meant was still to be unpacked but the earth shook.

If Jesus is no longer in the tomb, where is he? “He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.” He is going ahead of you. “Jesus is already in the future, already where they have not yet arrived. He’s gone ahead to Galilee, their home turf. **And** Jesus is already where we might be afraid to go. Jesus is going ahead to where we’re not sure we can get — closer to that new world Jesus called the kingdom, where the innocent do not suffer, injustice is banished and there are only tears of laughter and joy. Jesus calls us from the Lord’s future to which we are called.⁴ That’s what a resurrected Lord can do. The earth shook and the women ran with fear and great joy to tell the disciples the news and message.

Yet before they could reach the disciples, the women run smack into Jesus himself. I bet they felt the earth shake again. “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” There was Jesus in the present, too. They could hold him. He gave them reassurance. He gave them a command - “Get on the road to Galilee, to a new beginning and to continue the mission of the Messiah.”⁵ We might wonder in 2015, what of us? Where is our Galilee? Where can we meet Jesus? “There you will see me,” Jesus says, “you will see me:

in the Word that bears witness to me.

in your Baptism, where you were claimed for that eternal future
and bound to Me for all time;

You’ll meet me in communion where I feed you with my own life, give you
forgiveness and strength to carry you forward⁶.

You’ll meet me, Jesus says, in the community of the church,
where two or three gather in my name, there am I, in the
midst of them.”

“And you’ll meet me, as always, as I have told you, in the faces of
the hungry and thirsty, the naked and lonely, the sick and
imprisoned.”⁷ “For as much as you did it to one of the least
of these, you did it to me.”

Jesus is alive — with us now and going before us. “Easter is not about preserving the memory of a dead man. [Or going through the motions of] . . . formally mourning and remembering the life and works of Jesus. [Easter shook the earth] . . . Easter proclaims Christ is Risen, not two millennia ago, but this morning. We live in the plenitude and power of Christ’s resurrection. Christ is alive, not just for those scared and scattered disciples hiding in Jerusalem, but for each of us here today.” Jesus is meeting us here this morning

saying, “Do not be afraid. Get on your way and continue my mission. I am with you and I am waiting for you.”

Easter is not to be explained but to be lived. Easter shakes the world and us. Jesus who was dead is alive. He is with us in whatever is going on in our lives now and whatever we will face in the future. Easter makes it possible for us to leave despair at the tomb and go in hope . . . to choose the resurrection power of God over the death-dealing ways of the world . . . Easter frees us to go tell others . . . to meet Jesus in the everyday and extraordinary places on the road . . . and to take resurrection hope, life and love into the world with us. Let the earth shake with our awe and gratitude. Let us shake with anticipation to see where and how the risen Lord will meet us in our neighbors and friends, in our prayers and our efforts to do what is good and just. And may we never, ever stop being shaken by this transforming truth as it takes hold of our heart — Christ is risen. Alleluia. (He is risen indeed. Alleluia. Alleluia.) Amen

Linda M Alessandri 4/4/15

ENDNOTE

1. William Willimon as quoted by Walter John Kukkonen in his sermon outline, “What Is Easter?” in Christian Clippings aril 2015 p.12

2. Quotes in this paragraph from Willaim H. Willimon”Easter as an Earthquake,” The Collected Sermons of William H. Willimon Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010 p.p196-197

3. Leonard Sweet, “What Is Jesus Doing” Collected Sermons, ChristianGlobe Networks, 2007 0-000-1415

4. Arden W. Mead, “Easter Sermon” Creative Communications for the Parish, copyright 1993.

5. Leonard Sweet

6. paraphrase from Arden Mead “Easter Sermon”

7. Arden Mead