

Easter Day - 9.30am
Year C - 21/4/2019

Acts 10:34-43
Hymn to the Risen Christ
1 Corinthians 15:19-26
Luke 24:1-12

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

There are those who will tell you that all you have to do, to be a disciple of Jesus, is apply the formula of believing and behaving a certain way and you can live with nothing but certainty. But I suggest the opposite is true. Being a person of faith doesn't mean you get to be certain. If anything, it means that like Mary and Joanna and the other women this morning, you get to be surprised.

And so, I wonder, what if faith is about recognizing that when something is not expected, not predicted and when it is 100% surprising - that perhaps it's the work of God. Because honestly, we can manage the expected and unsurprising all on our own - we do that every day. When it's weird and seemingly impossible and somewhat out of nowhere - now that feels more like a God thing.

And if we are honest - this day above all others, fits into that category of 100% surprising. I mean, if we can't manage to be surprised by a man escaping a tomb; overcoming the power of death, and appearing to his astonished followers then we have probably missed the point of Easter.

I marvel at this event - the transition from the profound cold and darkness of the tomb to the warmth and the light of the outside world. And it challenges me, on a personal level, to consider the parts of my life that are still entombed - those "stuck" parts of me that I know need work; let alone the other parts of me that I don't even realise or acknowledge need to see the light.

For many of us, these parts of our lives can feel so set in their ways; so routine and banal that we have just come to accept them as part of ourselves. But this Easter story tells us, encourages us, that it doesn't have to be this way.

Michael Curry, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, is one of my favourite preachers. And one of his famous and familiar lines is this: “where we put a full-stop...God puts a comma”. Yes, believing in a God of resurrection means that the story is seldom over when we think it is.

So, this Easter, let me give you a challenge - in the same way that the first women who arrived at the tomb were shocked by what they found, don't assume you already know how the story of your life goes. Be prepared to be surprised.

And the reason why we should be prepared to be surprised is that Easter Sunday is not simply a commemorative anniversary of a past event. In fact, the earliest churches treated the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection as the timeless (or time-full) subject of every eucharistic liturgy. The establishment of an annual observance of Easter Day was a much later development.

And so the resurrection, although breaking into history on a specific temporal occasion, is not the domain of the past. As God's future showing itself in our present, it belongs to all times and seasons. It is the reason why as we blessed the Paschal Candle last night we prayed “Christ yesterday and today, the Beginning and the End, Alpha and Omega: all time belongs to him and all the ages.”

Jesus is alive, still showing up as a transfiguring presence in a world fraught with absences. Jesus is not over, and his story is not over. It will only be completed in the finality of the cosmos, when God is in all and all are in God.

This Easter, I implore you - don't assume you already know how the story goes. Be prepared to be surprised. Be surprised by empty tombs, surprised by the thing you never saw coming. Surprised that a relationship you thought was dead is not; surprised by how you are no longer afraid of that thing you used to be. Surprised, as we say, at empty tombs and the suddenness of dawn.

There is a wonderful Eucharistic Prayer used in the Episcopal Church at Easter - part of which uses these words:

“Therefore, with all who lost faith,
all who walked away in sadness,
with the women at the tomb,
and the men who hid in fear
we confess ourselves surprised
by the suddenness of dawn
and confess together the great mystery of faith”.

The Great mystery of faith is the sense of surprise we experience this day. This is how the God of resurrection is wanting to be known all around us. It’s happening already - everywhere, faith just lets us recognize the surprise of it.

This Easter time, may the God of surprises walk with you, and keep you always open to the unexpected in your life...

The Lord be with you.