

Witnessing Glory

NRS Colossians 3:1 So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth,

3 for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

4 When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

NRS Matthew 28:1 After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

2 And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.

3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

4 For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.

5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.

6 He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you."

8 So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

9 Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.

10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Loving Creator shine as a light before me that you may be seen and not I. Give me words that I may speak, give us ears that we may hear and through your Holy Spirit help us understand.

Amen.

I love holiday classics. Here is the beginning of a timely holiday classic:

Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

So begins the seasonal classic, A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens.

Wait a minute this is a Christmas story, do I have the wrong sermon? No, this is the right one, it is not a leftover Christmas sermon.

There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate.

This is not Christmas though, it is Easter. We don't usually hear about Scrooge and the three ghosts for many months yet.

This is Easter. On Easter the story begins the same way: Jesus was dead, this must be distinctly understood or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am to tell.

Jesus had died, and he was laid in a tomb, that much is certain.

This is what the disciples knew, this is what the women knew, the ones who watched at the foot of the cross as he died, and they knew he was sealed in the tomb. This is where we left off last week.

The innocent man, whose birth was announced by angels and Magi, the teacher, who followed God's will rather than human conventions, the prophet, who healed, this innocent man was falsely accused, and finally he was crucified.

This is what Jesus' friends knew: he was dead. We must remember that or the rest of what I have to say will not be so wonderful.

How many of you are Red Sox fans?

Were you fans before the curse was broken? There was a hopefulness in being a Sox fan back then. Sure, they may never do it, but there was always next year.

In 2004 they did not look any different than they usually did, they often looked good only to later disappoint. Yet hope remained. As the season progressed, many fans did not really expect them to win, but hope remained. As the post season arrived, it was clear that the hope was still alive, but let's be real, they had gotten this close before. But as they got closer and closer, the hope grew into possibility and finally, victory

When the Red Sox won the World Series it was almost unbelievable. Sox fans went crazy with excitement. Lottie Miller, God rest her soul, was in her nineties and she must have been jumping for joy, she waited a long time.

People were excited. This was not like when the Yankees win, when they win people just say, oh yeah the Yankees won again. No, this was really exciting, because it was unusual. Most people did not expect to see them win even though there was hope.

For Jesus' friends there was not even hope. They had forgotten his words; he said that he would die and come back on the third day. All they knew was that their friend and teacher had died.

I think this is something we can overlook, because we know the rest of the story. We know the story, we know what happens, it is something we expect.

I had someone come to me this week asking why Jesus died. The reality of the story came alive for this person in the walk through Holy Week. The story from the scriptures, the one we know so well, is a compelling story when we hear it fresh. After the walk through the question became acute: why did Jesus die?

The question of why Jesus died is a central one for Christians. While we may want easy answers and a single meaning, Christian theology has many answers not just one.

The word we use to discuss this is atonement, which is how we are made right with God.

We, as humans, do not live in harmony with God's will. We choose poorly and we are prone to saying no to God, this is called sin. Sin is what keeps us from a truly whole relationship with God. Sin keeps humans from God. It separates us from God's love.

We understand that Jesus came and resisted evil; he did God's will and he died because of the sinfulness that resides in all people. He died to offer us a way to be whole in God once again.

He died so God's power and authority could be revealed. He died to restore our relationship with God.

We can understand his death in as many ways as there are people, but the bottom line is that Jesus died to open the way for us to find God's love because that is where resurrection lies.

Resurrection is the victory of God's love.

A group of women went to the tomb early that morning because they needed to finish the burial rites. They knew what they would find, a cold tomb and a body within, but when they arrived they found something surprising, an earthquake, an empty tomb, a strange messenger and then Jesus himself.

Suddenly all that they thought they knew turned around. If Jesus was alive, what does that mean?

The resurrection caught them off guard. They had given up hope, they were convinced that Jesus was gone and yet here he is.

Resurrection catches us off guard, it is unexpected.

Soon we will see signs of resurrection in nature the trees will come back to life, some of those ladybugs will get up and leave - unfortunately not all. Crocuses and daffodils will bloom, the robins and hawks and red winged blackbirds will return.

We see these signs of new life around us, and, as we do, we get a thrill. Just last night Jodi got a big thrill.

She was out with our dog Lexie. The dog was sniffing with some great interest around some bushes. Suddenly out of one side of the bush popped a rabbit that took off across the lawn. No, Lexie was oblivious around the other side sniffing. But the bunny in the yard is a sure sign of spring.

And people chat about the signs of spring. I saw robins, someone else saw buds on the trees and someone else smelled skunk, this becomes the talk around town.

The women arrived at the tomb and found the risen Christ. They went to tell others, and they told others, and the story spread. It's a good story, isn't it?

Jesus is risen!

The thing is that this story was not just any story. It may have just become yet another fanciful story for people to tell their children, like stories of King Arthur or Robin Hood. Those are great stories too, but this story is different.

This one story of resurrection leads to many others.

A self righteous tent maker tried to make trouble for the early Christians. He was prepared to have Christians arrested and had an experience with this risen Jesus, and it changed his whole life around.

He began telling the story all around the Mediterranean and he wrote much of the New Testament. Paul had a resurrection in his life. In the Letter to the Colossians, Paul says, ok the experts are not sure that this was written by Paul, but work with me here.

In the letter to the Colossians Paul says:

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

If you have been raised with Christ - we find our resurrection in Christ.

This is what is possible in Christ: you may have given up hope, but resurrections are possible for the one who rose from the dead. The power of resurrection enters our world through him, and in our baptism we are united in his resurrection.

It has continued to happen as the story has been shared throughout the years. John Newton the slave ship captain who found new life in Jesus, eventually wrote Amazing Grace; he had a resurrection.

The story of what happened that day, that wonderful day when the stone was rolled away to reveal an empty tomb, that story continues to be told to this day because it has the power to change and transform lives.

An alcoholic who has found freedom from booze has found resurrection.

The addict that has gotten off drugs has seen a resurrection.

The homeless person who is given a chance to get back off the street through the Faith Hospitality Network has found a resurrection.

The person who was given a month to live and defies the odds has seen resurrection.

The person who is in prison for good reason but hears the story and finds the outstretched arms of a loving God has found resurrection.

The hospice patient who is reminded the God's love extends past the grave may even be able to find their resurrection in the promise of eternal life.

They have all seen a resurrection they have all witnessed glory. Resurrection is all around us if we care to see it. Reconciliation cooperation, wholeness, compassion, peacemaking, justice seeking, these are signs of God's resurrection just as sure as the buds on the trees signal the arrival of spring.

That morning long ago the women went to the tomb thinking about death, but instead they were made witnesses to the glory of God, the empty tomb and the resurrection.

Remember the day the Red Sox won? The excitement was too much. Imagine the reaction of Jesus' friends. At least there was some hope for the Sox! But Jesus alive, that was not expected, beyond hope.

Being a witness to the glory of God was a special gift that Easter morning.

We can all be witnesses of God's glory as we see resurrection for ourselves in our own lives. It is not just the alcoholic who needs new possibilities, it is not just the criminal who needs to hear the story of salvation, we all need a little resurrection power in our lives.

Jesus was dead, that much is certain. If it was not for that fact, the resurrection would not seem so wondrous. We are all in need of the salvation we find in the empty tomb: the promise of life eternal and the promise of love that makes us one with God.

We are invited to experience the resurrection of Jesus for ourselves as we join in his body.

Christ is risen, and we are invited to arise anew and experience the life that knows no end.

Alleluia!
AMEN!