

Easter Year C 2016

Our burial rite in the church is an Easter Liturgy. It derives all of its meaning from the resurrection....so say the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer. A paradox to be sure, that we would stand at the grave itself and celebrate... but as people of faith our vocation is to stand in the midst of a world racked by fear and shame and injustice and violence, and disease and death, and make the audacious claim that love is stronger.... That hope is not an illusion, that it is worthy of our trust... that life has meaning, purpose... that joy is set before us, for us who are faithful... for those of us who act 'as if'.... Those of us who act as if this vision of the Gospels is true.... That Love is stronger than death; stronger than evil... and that life will always find a way.

This story of the death and resurrection of Jesus is a story of Mythic proportions reminding us of the way life really is, the way the universe is put together... We hear the story throughout scripture; we heard the story tonight woven in the lore of Hebrew Scripture... We hear the story if we are paying attention from each other, the story sprung from experience... that even if we go down to the dark... and surely we will... even if we experience the worst, and we will... there is always the way ahead... that joy will break into the darkness as surely as the dawn... That there is, dare I say, a gracious, gracious cycle of death and transformation and birth... a gracious order God calls good.... I don't know why we are always surprised by that... surprised that there is new life after the sojourn in the valley of the shadow of death: New life when all is lost... It is not just a promise; it is something we know to be true.

At every funeral I have preached... I always eventually say the same thing... that the word for resurrection in the ancient language of scripture... literally translated means to stand with dignity... It means to stand in the freedom to be human... In freedom to bear God's Spirit of Love.... Resurrection is not just something that happened a long, long time ago... It is something that is forever happening.... An emerging freedom, an emerging world order characterized by mercy and justice and kindness and nonviolence.... Resurrection is the awakening from the nightmare of fear and shame into the dream God holds for the world... So, resurrection is a process, a practice characterized by sacrifice and joy and well-being and peace of mind.

The cross upon which Jesus was crucified is the opposite. It is the symbol of violence and shame and suffering. We keep crosses in our churches to remind ourselves of what resurrection life stands against.... Let us never make the mistake of thinking that Jesus is the only crucified of our world... people are crucified every day... In Syria... in Iraq.... In Somalia... in Sudan... in Guatemala... in Ferguson... In the streets of Mobile.... The world still gives up its victims... the crucified still cry from the cross.

But let us also never make the mistake of thinking that Jesus is the only one God raised.... The victims of our world still cry out from their crosses for mercy and new life and hope and joy.... and God will raise them just as God always has, and just as God always will.... Life will find a way.

Brothers and sisters, our vocation is to be the resurrection of the dead; that is what incarnation means, that we bear Christ's resurrected life to the world... to bring to our world dignity and well-being and peace of mind and non-violence... Ours is to keep hope alive... Ours is to attend to the grace of the created order as it is intended... This is no idle tale, but the truth... that love is stronger than death; that God is forever remaking the world into what God intends it to be... that there is nothing to fear... that all manner of thing will be well...

Tonight all across the Christian world, people are being baptized... they are joining us in God's audacious project of resurrection... They are shouldering the legacy of loving one's neighbor... they are claiming the promise that hope is alive... they are promising to stand against the evil of the world.... They are choosing life instead of death.

Dear people of God, trust the story... trust the irony, trust the paradox.... trust the story of rebirth... not just of our brother Jesus... This is our story too.... The tomb is empty.... Death cannot contain the life of God... nor ours... Live into God's life... live into God's life for the joy set before us... Live into God's life for the sake of all who are yet dead... You know the truth of the story... Now, put aside that which holds you back.... and live it.