

“NOT HERE, BUT RISEN”

A Sermon for Easter, the Resurrection of Our Lord, March 27, 2016

Text: Luke 24:1-12

They said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”

The good news that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead is being proclaimed this morning in so many beautiful ways that I hesitate before attempting to proclaim it with something so pedantic as a little talk.

The art, the anthems, the flowers, ancient texts, hymns with brass — all of these delight the senses and announce the resurrection.

There is bad news aplenty in this world. We spend enough time dwelling on bad news. There was bad news that first Easter morning—Jesus was missing. However, there was also good news. Unbelievably good news. The *reason* he was not there, was that he had risen, as he had told them he would.

In the “bad-news” lands of Galilee and Samaria and Judea, Jesus had for a few years been the personification of good news. Long enough and persuasively enough to inspire many quasi-dead people to come to life. Then, in a terrible turn of events, he had been taken from his believers, and within a few hours they all became disbelievers again. Non-followers, because he wasn’t there to follow. Well, they argued about which of them would assume his mantle, but Jesus stopped them.

Instead they started planning how they would live now that Jesus was dead. How they would face life without the one who always told them not to be afraid of this or that. They were ready to move on. They would memorialize their friend in some songs about how good and great he was, but those songs would be of the blues sort, because, after all, he was gone. They would mark his grave and print some tee shirts commemorating his final tour, then go back to life as it was before. They would reconcile their high hopes with “reality,” and within a few generations Jesus would be not just dead but forgotten. The tee shirts would wear out and they would find someone else to follow.

But then (as you and I have known for years) the women who cared the most about Jesus, his truest disciples, went to look for him in the place he should have been, by all rights. **But he was not there.** The rest is history.

Correction, the rest is *mystery*.

If you could find the grave of Jesus, if you could find his body, then it would be history. But because of where Jesus went when he left the tomb, it is mystery. But it is not a mystery which perplexes us, it is a mystery we celebrate.

That is because we know where Jesus went. But our knowing is a knowing by faith. And when I tell you where he went, where Jesus is today, you’ll just shrug and say “I knew that.” Because the answer should be obvious. Jesus is here. Yes, he ascended to the Father and sits at his right hand. But just as truly, he is here.

Jesus is here in our *gathering*. He is here as we dwell in his *word*. He is here as we *commune*. And he goes with us as we are *sent* from this place.

This is actually the shape of our liturgy, as you may know. These are the four “things we do,” when we get together. Over the centuries, liturgy has taken many shapes, but retains this basic form.

First, we gather—because Jesus promises to be with us when we do so. Ergo, he is here. He said, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” (Mt 18:20) So we do. Gather in his name. Congregating *in and of itself*, merely gathering in the name of Jesus, is not merely a fun thing to do. We are not just a bunch of people when we gather, or just “community,” we are in communion with the Risen One in whose name we gather.

Second, we listen to the Word—because Jesus promises that when we do so, he is among us. Judas (not the Iscariot one, but the other one) asked Jesus before he departed how it would be possible that his followers would see Jesus when the world would not see Jesus. Didn’t make sense, and still doesn’t, rationally. Jesus’ answer was, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” Ergo, he is here.

Third, we have a meal together. The meal itself would be entirely insignificant as food goes, except that in our taking this meal together, we remember and recognize and take into ourselves the very life of Jesus himself. Jesus is present (“This is my body,” “This is my blood”) in our sharing this meal.

After Jesus was raised, two of his disciples spent a day with him without knowing that he was Jesus, on their way to Emmaus. But when they sat down to eat with Jesus, and he blessed the bread they were about to eat and broke it, all of a sudden they saw him.

So it has been, ever since. In the breaking of the bread, you and I see the body of Christ not only in the elements on the table but in our being the body of Christ in the world. We eat this meal, and he is here.

Finally, we are sent. This is the shortest element of our liturgy, but equally as vital. For Jesus did not say he would be with us so we would be comfortable. He didn’t promise to curl up with us and watch the world fall apart. He sent us, and as he sent us out to love, to proclaim the good news of the kingdom, and to heal the world, he said “I am with you always, to the end of the ages.” That was what he said to the disciples, Matthew 28, when he commissioned them. Always, when Jesus charged his people to go be salt and light and makers of peace and servants of all, he said “and I will with be with you.”

We are sent from this place not with a buzz, but with a commission. Go in peace and *serve the Lord*. As we go, the resurrected Christ, the Lord of Life, goes with us and in us.

You don’t need me to tell you that the world is disturbed, dangerous, and at times dreadful. I get that, and so do you. We could just sit around bewailing the fact that Jesus isn’t here to fix things. But what Jesus wants the world to get is that in the midst of that world, mixed in amid all the trouble and anxiety, stands the Resurrected Christ among his people, calling us and empowering us by his Spirit to live *against* the flow of history, and to bring the world a message which can break fear, give hope, and bring a new creation into being. That is why we gather, why we dwell in his word, why we take this particular meal; and that is how we are sent. So that

“Why look for the living among the dead?” they asked. It didn’t make sense then, and it doesn’t make sense today. Look for the Living One among the living. Look for the risen Christ right here. Among the living.
Amen.

