

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed. Alleluia!

We travel to the tomb this morning and this is our cry, but it was not so for the women who set out for the tomb that morning. **They** carried spices, prepared to anoint the body of their beloved teacher.

They went to the tomb to honor the dead and in respect for the power of death over all of us. It is easy to forget on this festival day that those women went to the tomb expecting to find Jesus dead.

Perhaps their suspicions were aroused when angels greeted them at death's door. But these angels weren't there to console mourners, but to announce a new beginning, and an unexpected new life emerging.

Just like Gabriel announced to Mary about a new life to emerge from her womb, the angels at the tomb were there to announce God at work bringing new life out of a tomb....and they do it with the same words **Do Not be afraid.**

Frankly, it is hard to Be Not Afraid.

An empty tomb is a confounding story

but let us not hurry to tame this dangerous mystery into a harmless tool which simply re-arranges the details of a dead end world.

Let us agree together to approach the tomb this Easter morning refusing to make these 'painfully untidy stories'* into something more acceptable.

Let us not defuse this mystery of gift and wonder of a resurrected life and transform it into bunnies and daffodils, unrealized hopes or pie in the sky.

In spite of our glorious hymns, lilies and family gatherings, even we people of **faith make Easter too small** -...because Easter divides all human history into before and after – **before** the cross and **after** the tomb.

Before the cross: That time before we knew the breadth and scope of God's plan for the world,

before the dead ends of our world became gateways of hope,

before that Easter morn marked a new beginning, when the spirit hovered over the earth and God called into being new life

–before life itself was transformed.

Before we understood that love outlasts all things.

The rolling away of the stone, flooding the darkness of the tomb with light, marks the beginning of the time 'after'.

After the tomb where Jesus offered his hands to all who are trapped in that darkness. It was God's invitation into an uncharted tomorrow, our first step into an unknown wilderness, the beginning of our Passover.

And so with the angels I say Be not afraid.

Every year this impossible, incredible story explodes into our lives.

We are confronted by God's future smack in the middle of our present

and I think if we are paying attention at all we are **left off-balance and uncertain** – wondering what it could mean and asking not the **HOW of the resurrection** but **WHY resurrection at all?**

Because when we look around - even in this year when the holy seasons of Easter, Passover and Ramadan coincide - there is brutal war in the Ukraine and young girls are being sold as child brides in Afghanistan so their families can eat.....and it doesn't look like resurrection.

So, the question for those who live on this side of an empty tomb, in the time after resurrection ... is

“What would life for us look if we said YES to the life that Easter proclaims while saying a loud NO to death and destruction of the world we know.

What does life look like when **Death is real but not final**, and the darkness of the tomb is but the moment before the dawn of a new birth.

In some renaissance paintings, Jesus is depicted rising from the tomb and reaching out to grasp the hands of the dead, pulling them out of their tombs – and into the cosmic life which Jesus reveals to us

What would it look like for us to live each day with the faith that even in the deepest darkness, Christ’s hand was reaching out for ours

– to pull us into his Easter dawn, to roll the stone away from our tomb and to lift us up into new life – to transform us and our lives starting now!

Hold onto to that picture today. Jesus reaching out to pull us into the on-going, eternal mystery that awaits us – like a new land lying just beyond the horizon. Grasp that hand, and step into new life.

And again I say, Be not afraid.

The things of this world which are killing us have a powerful gravity that pulls us down under the weight of our own fear, but In the glory of this day, the risen Jesus invites us to **grasp the hand of Jesus who as he rises, raises us up as well.**

We are invited to live our lives as testimony to the risen-ness of Jesus

– as testimony that death is real but not final

– as testimony that out of darkness new light can shine.

We are invited to commit ourselves to this Jesus, to take him as our north star, our source of affirmation, renewal and healing and to allow the power of transformation from death to life to begin, **first IN us, and then THROUGH us.**

It can be hard work to live each day in the divine mystery, to cling to a God who is too often unfathomable, who defies logic and invites doubt. It can be hard work to bend a knee for others, as Jesus did, and to trust God in light of the headlines, to allow God to be God, especially when we don't understand.

We are invited on this day of days, to grasp the hand of transformed life in Jesus **and then to be the hand that reaches out to another to offer them new life as well.** Because today is about life – life abundant, life now.

Be not afraid my friends, for Christ is risen.. He is Risen indeed.
Alleluia.

*Rowen Williams quote