

April 5, 2015 -- Easter Sunday

*The Cross as Doorway to the Resurrection* - Rev. Seth D. Jones ©

Scripture: *Isaiah 25:6-9; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Mark 16:1-8*

Jesus Christ is risen today!

This is the central truth of the faith. And today is why we gather together every Sunday. On this Sunday in particular, we gather with our brothers and sisters around the world, like the women who gathered to go to the tomb of Jesus. When they arrive, the angel says to them, *“Do not be alarmed: You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified”* (*Mark 16:6*). We come together on this Sunday because we are also looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified.

We gather together to retell the story, even relive the story, with prayers, readings, music and hymns, and sharing a meal, like the disciples did all those years ago. We share the Good News of Christ's resurrection with each other and the world.

The intention of God is always a paradox. God at once loves each person individually and also the entire world, all of Creation. And so this story we retell today tells us that, in order for God's love to be fully present, the whole world must be included in the promises of God, which were previously only for God's chosen people.

This sounds simple, but the problem is very big. Let's remember how we got to where we are today. Last Sunday, we celebrated Palm Sunday, the day Jesus entered Jerusalem and was heralded as a king. Then, at the Last Supper on Thursday, we saw things were happening in the background. Religious and political authorities were trying to kill Jesus. Betrayal happened and Jesus was turned over to the authorities. On Friday, Jesus is crucified after a trial in front of Pilate. And Jesus, the One who was the Messiah, dies on the Cross. The problem God needs to overcome is that, as the Gospel of John says, *the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light* (*Jn 3:19*). God saw this problem could not be solved by waiting for the people to figure it out and so *God so loved the world that he gave his Only Son so that those who believe may not perish but have eternal life* (*Jn 3:16*). This is the promise of the Resurrection and all the things leading up to today are, in the light of Christ's Resurrection, the ways God's love becomes victorious over the death of His Son on the Cross.

Paul tells the story very simply in our reading today. He says this story is of the *‘first importance’*: *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of*

*whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)*

Today we are with the women going to the tomb. We are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. And to get to the Resurrection, we must go through the Cross.

Today, the Cross, the symbol of the faith, points to one thing and one thing only - the Resurrected Christ. The Cross is the doorway to the Resurrection of Jesus. The Cross becomes the doorway to the love of God for the entire world and all of creation. For those who choose to participate in this great story, they choose to walk in between the original Creation in the book of Genesis and the complete renewal of the heavens and the earth in the book of Revelation.

When the women are walking toward the tomb, they say to one another, *“I wonder who will open the door to the tomb for us? Who will roll away the stone so we can enter?”* Who, indeed? Who will open the door for us as well? What will allow us to walk into these symbols and get through them to the truth to which they point? The angel inside the tomb gives us a bit of an answer. He says, *“The one you seek is going ahead of you...there you will see him, just as he told you”* (Mk 16).

We, with the Marys and Salome, must go through the tomb, must go through the Crucifixion, must go through the questioning and the despair and the anxiety to follow the One who has gone ahead of us, the Resurrected Jesus. Between Christ's resurrection and the resurrection we will share with him, we walk with Jesus on the path he has already walked.

The fuel for faith, I have always said, is in the paradoxes of the faith. Because you and I live in between and walk with Jesus in this world now, we do not get to resolve many things, but that is why we gather together, is it not? To retell the story and remember who we are because of what God has done for us? We live within the tension of the symbol of our faith - The Cross. And we do this because the Cross points to the Resurrected Christ, which we proclaim with Disciples, the Apostles, with Paul and the great cloud of witnesses throughout history today.

See, when the follower of Christ sees the Cross, it would be easy to believe we only see one thing - the torture device it was designed to be. But in the Resurrection of God's Son, Jesus Christ, even death itself has been overcome. And so now, the Cross becomes a symbol of the transforming power and love of God with us. The tensions of this world are symbolized in the Cross, reaching up and down, and across in every direction. When the Christ-follower sees the Cross, he or she sees the possibility of love, even though hatred is

present; the birth of forgiveness and pardon, even though injury and violence is present; the seeds of faith, even within a culture of doubt and skepticism; the rising of hope and healing, even though despair and pain are everywhere; the shining of God's light, even though human darkness blinds us; and the arms of God's joy seeking to embrace all things, even though sadness pervades the heart of the world.

The Cross leads to the Resurrection; God's Son has died for our sake and arisen on the third day - these are the great paradoxes of the Gospel, the Good News of this day. Perhaps you have come here today in suffering, in grief, in despair, in darkness. Perhaps they have been created by your own actions. Perhaps they have been imposed upon you by another person, a group of people, a government or bureaucracy. Perhaps you have no idea why you are suffering.

The follower of Christ does not deny these experiences. We know we cannot go from the gates of Jerusalem shouting "*Hosanna to the King*" on Palm Sunday to Resurrection Sunday without first going through the Last Supper and Judas' betrayal, through the trial in the court of Pilate, through the journey through the streets as Jesus carries his Cross, to the mount of Golgotha where the centurions hung Jesus upon the Cross while his disciples abandoned and denied him, to the road to Emmaus where Jesus' disciples walked in despair and saw their lives shattered. We do not deny the suffering of the world.

We see the Cross of Christ in all these things - in disease which ravages our bodies, in governments who imprison and put to death innocents, in accidents which take the lives of those whom we love, in acts of horror like pilots who slam planes into buildings and mountains or in soldiers who put students who believe differently from them to death in broad daylight. The despair, the suffering, the horror, the death is real. They were real for Jesus of Nazareth.

But we are also people who live in the promises of God. And God wants the promises of Jesus' Resurrection for each of us, because the Resurrection is the center of the story. In the Gospel of John, Jesus gives a final speech to the disciples before he begins his journey to the Cross, and then to the Resurrection. Jesus says to them, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me...I have said these things to you while I am still with you...Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, "I am going away, and I am coming to you." If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me;*

*but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us be on our way (Jn 14:6, 25-31).*

The Risen Christ walks with us as we walk between the Cross in our everyday life and the Resurrection we will share with Jesus. In this Way, in this story, we are learning how to live with the presence of the Risen Christ. So let us, with the disciples, rise and be on our Way, together, on that great road which leads to the Great Banquet God promises for each of us,

*where the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples*

*a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines,*

*of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear.*

*And he will destroy on this mountain*

*the shroud that is cast over all peoples,*

*the sheet that is spread over all nations;*

*he will swallow up death for ever.*

*Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,*

*and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,*

*for the LORD has spoken...This is the LORD for whom we have waited;*

*let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation (Isaiah 25:6-9).*

Christ is risen!

He is risen, indeed!