

“Resurrections” based on John 20:1-20 , Easter Sunday, April 8, 2012
Preached by Rev. Adrienne Carr
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I would like to tell you a story that helps me understand the Mystery of the Resurrection. It was Spring, 1988. That Easter Season was spectacular. It was filled with the scent of flowers, the songs of birds and the lengthening days of warmth and sun. On one of those beautiful Spring days, a delegation of clergy from the Washington DC area representing Bridges For Peace, landed in Moscow and were welcomed by clergy from the Russian Orthodox Church, our hosts on that trip.

We, I was one of the delegation, were taken on a journey that I will never forget. That Easter season was also the season of Glasnost. The frozen monolith of Soviet Communism was beginning to melt in the warmth of that Easter season. It was a time of fear giving way to hope. Soldiers were everywhere and men in black leather coats were occasionally spotted. Yet everywhere we went, people would come up to us, hug us and give us small gifts like a piece of fruit or a decorated spoon. I felt that I was an observer to a miracle.

Each day of our trip, we were taken to churches all over the country from Moscow to what was then called Leningrad. Each church we visited was filled to capacity with people suddenly unafraid to worship in public. Within those ancient churches, some of which had been reclaimed after years of neglect, we witnessed babies being baptized, old ladies and young soldiers lighting incense sticks before icons. People of all ages lined up to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion and bow their heads in prayer. And everywhere, we heard adults and children, business people, bureaucrats and shop clerks all proclaim the Easter refrain:

khris-tOs vas-krYEs

va-Ist-in-oo vas-krYEs

“Christ is risen. He is truly risen!”

Somewhere on That journey we stopped being tourists and became pilgrims. We were taken into great cathedrals and small churches. We saw simple worship and impressive liturgies. And as we listened to the powerful voices of Orthodox choirs singing the Creed in ancient words set to music composed by Tchaikovsky, our guide and our bus driver sat outside and listened to the melody of the on-going debate in the Duma. On those Spring Easter days, they along with all of Russia began to envision a future that had seemed impossible not long before. That Easter season of 1988 was, in a sense, the rolling away of the stone that heralded a new beginning for Russia and for the world. In a very real way, we witnessed the beginning of a Resurrection. And still we watch Russia as Resurrection continues to assert itself despite politics.

Christ is risen. He is risen, indeed.

For Mary, Peter, John and the other men and women disciples, in the hours following the crucifixion of their Lord, the world was no longer full of joy and energy. It was cold and empty. They went to the tomb hoping to find that it had all been a terrible mistake. But the emptiness of the tomb only made their emptiness more acute. And Mary wept. And then she saw her beloved teacher and the world was no longer empty. But it would never be the same.

Christ is risen. He is risen, indeed.

What does Resurrection mean beyond an empty tomb outside the walls of First Century Jerusalem? That singular mystical event, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ cannot be explained by science or technology. It is the defining moment of Christianity and it is a mystery. That mystery has echoed down all the centuries of human existence since that early Sunday morning. And in all those years, theologians and scientists have debated and argued and ultimately settled for accepting the moment in faith or not at all. But that is so narrow a perspective when Resurrection ultimately means life exploding forth in the midst of terrible pain or darkness or hopelessness. It means a heart so filled with love that nothing can contain that love; not hate nor guilt nor abandonment nor fear, nor death, itself.

How often has each of us seen resurrection in families, among communities and in the world and not known to call it by its true name? A family member becomes addicted to drugs or alcohol; steals, cuts off relationships and becomes lost in the addiction. Through intervention and support, the addicted person goes into treatment and perseveres into new life. That is resurrection. An individual lost in the depths of depression finds the way back from darkness and life is renewed. This is a resurrection. A wall is torn down in Berlin. Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland lay down their arms and end the terrible killing. In great and in deeply personal ways, The miracle of Resurrection is felt and seen and celebrated.

“We are Easter People and Alleluia is our song,” Wrote St. Augustine. In the history of the world, those who have dedicated their lives to living as Easter People, have brought resurrection into humanity’s darkness. Who are these anonymous resurrection people? Those who did not run from the plagues but stayed to nurse the dying; those who took love of neighbor so seriously that they hid Jews from the Nazis; those who have spoken out against all the barriers that divide and separate one from another; those who see a glass not half empty but filled to overflowing with hope for our Good Friday world. These are Easter People and Alleluia is the song they sing for us.

In Romans, Paul writes, “The whole creation waits breathless with anticipation for the revelation of God’s sons and daughters.” (8:19) Putting on a Resurrection life is our Christian privilege and responsibility. In numerous small daily kindnesses and in great acts of loving kindness we are called not to the empty tomb but to the living Christ. As Mary could not hold him in place, we cannot contain him in words of scripture. He breaks forth into human life transforming narrow ways of thinking and limited ways of seeing as he calls us into resurrection of hearts, minds and lives. This is our Christian heritage. This is our call. For we are Easter people now and always and Alleluia is the song that moves our lives.

I close with the words of e.e. Cummings in an Easter Poem that overflows with joy and truth.

i thank You God for this most amazing
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes
(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth
day of life and love and wings: and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any-lifted from the no
of all nothing-human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?
(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.