

Easter Day
April 20, 2014
Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose
Acts 10:34-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
Colossians 3:1-4
John 20:1-8

I had one of our church family members share with me during this past Holy Week that Easter is their favorite season of the year, so much more so than Christmas, because it is so much less commercialized. There may be a TV ad for Cadbury eggs, but there is so much less that the stores can do with Easter. So its celebration can be left for the churches and not the shopping malls. There can be a real focus on what it is really about.

And of course, what Easter is about is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was an innocent man, dead from a cruel execution on a cross, and now God has raised him from the dead, and he has appeared to many people who knew him. It was definitely him; he was really alive!

But there is more to the event than the divine Son of God being brought back to life. In fact, there are three dimension that the early church fathers taught concerning the Resurrection: a past, present, and future dimension.

Resurrection is a single historical event from the past. There are multiple accounts in our Scriptures of the women, and his disciples, and others who had followed him during his three year long ministry – people who saw him, talked with him, ate meals with him, and even touched the wounds from his crucifixion. All of these accounts were written to provide absolute proof that Jesus really did rise from death to life.

Second, Resurrection is an event that Old Testament prophesies describe as an event that all who worship God will experience at the end of time; Jesus himself promised that his ascension into heaven had to happen so that he could make a place for each of us there, and that he would be with us there forever.

Third, the first and second century church fathers taught that Resurrection exists at every moment in time. It is always present and accessible for those who ask for it. Did you notice? We have to ask for it. The Spirit of God blesses the hearts and minds of believers with an awareness of the presence of the Resurrected Jesus. There is a level of our knowing, beyond our needing the medical explanation of how it is possible, where we feel the presence of Jesus in our life.

I love the story of the meeting of Mary and Jesus outside the tomb where he had been buried for three days. When she found out that the tomb was empty, she was frantically trying to find out who had taken Jesus' body away. She was talking with

the two angels who were sitting in the tomb; and then she turned around and saw that Jesus was standing there. Do you suppose the angels were pointing behind her, as if to say, “Um, look Mary, behind you!”

I wonder how long Jesus had been standing there, listening to the whole conversation. Now that we know that Jesus is truly alive, we know that he could always be, and likely is always right behind Mary, and right behind you and me, ready to bring comfort.

He IS here for you. You do not need to face today, or your work day, or your disagreements with people you love, or our financial pressures alone. This is not a philosophical mind-test. It is a spiritual reality that Jesus is here for you. All you need to do is invite him. Our sense of that divine presence motivates us to pray, to memorize the Lord’s Prayer, to study the Bible, to go to church... Our quest is to connect our spirit to His Spirit, to feel his presence.

He is here whether we feel him or not. He is here whether we are ready for him or not. Paul wrote in his letter to the church in Colossae that we are able to live forever with Jesus in the joy of his resurrection. That ‘forever’ starts now, in this life, today.

The Resurrection, Easter, is precisely for those who are not ready for it, at the time we are not expecting it, when we have forgotten about God, or when we are too overwhelmed by the busy-ness or the chaos of our own life, that we can suddenly sense that Jesus is standing behind us, ready to give us comfort.

So let’s celebrate. Let’s take in the lilies, and the candles, and this beautiful California Spring day, and the children hunting for Easter eggs, and the brunch here this afternoon, and meals later with more family and friends. Let’s celebrate the Resurrection, and let’s invite some people to experience it with us.

Alleluia, Christ is risen. *The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia! Amen.*