

Easter Sunday Sermon

The Rev. Pamela L. Foster

Trinity Church in the City of Boston

Easter Sunday

April 16, 2006

In the words of the song, “O, what a beautiful morning! O, what a beautiful day!” And it would be were sleet and hail falling from the skies. It is Easter, and we celebrate our God who has raised Jesus from the dead. All we who follow Jesus rejoice and are glad in this day. Our worship space, magnificent unadorned and left to itself, has been lovingly and beautifully adorned by our parishioners for the celebration. Doubly adorned it is in thanksgiving to our God. The music (thank you choirs and musicians for all the music of holy week and of Easter and thank you congregation for raising your voices in song.) for today fills our space and our very hearts, reaching for that place of song in all of us that loves to praise the Lord. When the last Easter service concludes more than 160 Trinity parishioners will have participated in some way in our many worship ministries. Our praying; our gathering at the altar, all of this is our joyful offering, our sacrifice of thanksgiving to our God and to the risen Christ of God.

Soar we now where Christ has led,
foll’ wing our exalted head,
made like him, like him we rise,
ours the Cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia

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As I speak from the joy of our celebration, I am well aware that some of us feel isolated from that joy. This year the joy of Easter eludes you. You are not alone. In fact you are in good company, the company of Jesus’ first disciples. I’ll speak more about that in a minute. But now, just know we are grateful you have come hereto worship with us today. Know also that, as Peter Gomes (Minister of Memorial Church) is alleged to say to people who go to church only on Christmas and Easter, “You are in the right place at the right time.”

I am aware, as well, that some of us – in this interim time at Trinity Church – are impatient. “When, exactly, will Holy Spirit, aided by the Search Committee, deliver the 19th rector to Trinity Church?” Others, on the other hand, are still mourning the departure of the former rector. And, still others are anxious because “everything” is changing. And you are correct. Everything is changing and will continue to change. That is because God is always making things new, renewing things. God may let us rest for a while, even for a number of years together, but God is not One to let us settle down. We are called out to journey on to the next things that God has in store for us.

There is a lot that churns within us even in the midst of joy.

And I am aware that there is as much to lament in the world as ever there was. For instance, we are taught to fear one another; to watch our back; to live to get and spend, guard what we have. The messages all around us are that mean-ness, selfishness, isolation define human being.

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We, the Easter people, believe that Easter meets all of that (the joy and the anxiety, the impatience and the grieving and the grievous messages we are taught ... Easter meets all that with an embrace, the embrace of a loving God. We believe that Easter has planted in us and in God's world the power to heal, to transform, to be transformed. But nobody could see that right away on the first Easter, and we are adept at hiding it away from ourselves. That's why we need the celebration. To bring it home once more.

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The women we hear about in Mark's gospel were a devastated little group. When we meet them in Mark's Gospel, they are going to their dear friend's tomb, to anoint his body - an act of reverence, of love, of remembrance. They expect to have some difficulty in moving a big rock that seals his tomb so they can carry out their ritual of love and sadness.

Speaking of everything changing and continuing to change, speaking of moving a big rock! When those women arrived at the tomb, nothing was as they expected. They were afraid and they fled.

Not a day of gladness, joy, soaring above the skies.

Everybody else who had followed Jesus felt pretty much the same way. When they pulled themselves together, evidently, the women delivered the message they had been given, and the common responses to it were disbelief, amazement, fear. No mention of joy.

All of them worried about their safety - would they be recognized as his followers? ... arrested, imprisoned, perhaps executed as well? They worried about what that empty tomb meant; what, "He has been raised," could mean. They went back to Galilee, where their life with him had begun and worried about what, "He is going ahead of you to Galilee," could possibly mean." And if it meant, somehow, they would be with him again, how could he love them as before; how could he forgive them? They had all run away.

There was no joy in that.

They had hitched their wagon to his star. He wanted them and every one he met, even the people who opposed him, to recognize their own worth, their own goodness in God's eyes. He wanted them to find a renewed confidence in God's unfailing presence to them, God's commitment to them. (Sometimes it felt like a relentless commitment.) He wanted to form and shape a community of people who were - strange word - kind, fundamentally kind. ("Be swift to love and be kind," we say as we bless in His Name.) A community of people who would suffer and sacrifice together, if called upon. He had a vision, that he lived, of being a healing presence to others who were suffering. He was interested in helping people to be just and to seek justice for all. To be forgiving and to ask and receive forgiveness. He seemed to want everyone to recognize

that everyone is linked to everyone else. But his star had plummeted from the sky, dragging them down too. All of it was over and gone.

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And they were mistaken ... understandably so, but were mistaken. The God Jesus revealed to this sad little band of people, the God of all Creation was at work, as God is at work in our own day and time. When they realized that, the joy came flooding in. When that message came home, then, they found the joy of Easter. Their sadness and their lives were transformed. They could stand with one another, for another, with Christ, for Christ. They carried the message and the work of God's love into the world. They became the Church. And they spread around the world and down through the centuries. To ... today and to us.

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Mr. Paul Rusesabagina, is the former manager of Hotel Rwanda. In the midst of the Rwanda genocide Mr. Rusesabagina, with great risk to himself, was able to convince Hutu authorities to leave unharmed for longer than anyone would have imagined possible the Tutsi people who had taken refuge in the hotel. This shaky agreement made possible some safe passage convoys that otherwise never would have occurred. In a recent interview Rusesabagina was asked how he had been able to convince the authorities to grant that precarious asylum. In his reply he spoke the following sentence, "Even the hardest heart has a part that is soft."

He is one man. We Easter people are many.

Come eat and drink with your risen Lord, today. Invite the power of his resurrection and the joy of his presence to fill you. Ask him to show you the beautiful soft parts of your own heart and if you are having trouble finding them, to reacquaint you with them. So that you may flourish as his *beloved* disciples. Hear him calling again to us to come together to carry his message, proclaim his vision and spread the joy of his resurrection. Hear him proclaim that shoulder to shoulder we can embrace the hardness at the heart of the world with the transforming power of his love.

Oh what a beautiful morning. Oh what a beautiful day. Alleluia, the Lord is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Amen.