

Who gets our attention?

A sermon preached by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Saint John's Episcopal Church, Franklin, Massachusetts on Easter, the Day of Resurrection, April 4, 2010.

The women were terrified and they bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen" Luke 24: 5

It was the task of the women in those days to prepare a body for burial. When the body of Jesus was taken down from the cross, the Sabbath had already begun, so they had to wait until early the next day to anoint the body for burial. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary, the mother of James were the first to arrive early the next morning at the garden tomb provided by Joseph of Arimathea. What they found was not what they expected. The tomb was empty and the body of Jesus was gone! When they ran to tell others, no one believed them. They had to see for themselves. These first witnesses of the resurrection knew that what Jesus had said about being raised on the third day had come true.

Easter is God's way of getting our attention. There is little else in history that is so astounding and difficult to comprehend as Jesus being raised from the dead. It is the central event of the Christian faith. If the resurrection is not true, Christianity is nothing more than a sick joke and we are wasting our time. Because it is real, hope triumphs over despair and the promise of victory of life over death has been kept. However the stone was rolled away, the discovery of the empty tomb is central to Christianity

We are the people of Easter. Because of what happened on that day, we have been raised with Christ and are freed from the power of sin and death. To be the people of Easter means that we have died to the old life of sin and are raised to the new life of grace. Because of this, our lives are no longer defined by the mundane and the ordinary, but by the extraordinary. We do not live by shallow and false values, nor do we give in to the whims and temptations that lead us to ruin. Our power over sin and death enables us set our minds not on things that fade away, but on things that last. Easter people have power over every form of evil, be it greed, selfishness, disease, poverty, homelessness, hunger, crime, pollution or terrorism. We have the power to overcome any form of oppression that disregards the dignity of every human being.

With Christ's powerful love working in us, there isn't anything that cannot be overcome. The only thing that holds us back is our own fear and reluctance to believe that the power of resurrection really works in us. It works to change a parent who mistakes indulgence for love. It works to change those who abdicate their responsibilities at work. It works to change adult children who are impatient with their aging parents. The resurrection empowers us to move from heartache to hope, from fear to faith, from bewilderment to belief.

The Bible gives us details about the trial, the suffering, the crucifixion, and the death and burial of Jesus, but we are provided with few details about the resurrection. All we do know is what happened after the discovery of the empty tomb. Resurrection power enabled the church to grow from a small band of men and women whose faith in the risen Christ enabled the Christian message to reach over a quarter of the earth's population today. Great minds have witnessed to Christ in spoken and written word, in healings and miracles and in grace received in ordinary ways. God has gotten our attention and has changed our lives by the power of Christ living and working in us.

It is by the grace of God that the power of the resurrection enables those diametrically opposed to each other to reach genuine reconciliation. It enables us to be about our common task of living and sharing our faith with those who have no faith. The greatest obstacle to our primary task of knowing Christ and making him known are divisions over doctrine and tradition.

The resurrection is God's way of making us sit up and take notice. There is nothing ambiguous about it. When the resurrection becomes real in each of us, our attention is diverted from personal agendas to God's intention for us.

The good news is that the world doesn't revolve around us, nor does everything depend upon us. The good news is that God doesn't need our advice on how to run the universe. After all, God has been at this long before any of us ever took our first breath and will be here long after we are gone from this earth. Meanwhile, we must allow God to get through to the one whom we see in the mirror each morning.

Life begins when we stop worrying about what might go wrong and start making things go right. Life begins when we stop asking questions that have no answers and learn to live the questions themselves. Life begins after we stumble and fall get back into the game.

To defeat fear is to defeat death and to defeat death is what Easter is all about. The only thing worse than our fear of death is our fear of life. Life is to be lived, not feared. Christ has gone before us to free us from fear, fear of life, of suffering, of death and of what lies in the future. Christ's life is an example of endurance to help us face any hardship by drawing upon his strength and courage and enduring love. This is what makes us the people of Easter; this is what makes us the people of the empty tomb.