

John Sampson
"We Are Found"
Text: Matthew 27:50 - 54
Preached at KVCC
April 26, 2020

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

Amen.

Alleluia!

Christ is risen.

I greet you all with Easter greetings today because although the holiday of Easter may be over, the season of Easter, which we call Eastertide, is young. Just like there are thoughts, and ideas, and experiences that are too big to be jammed into a tweet, so there is too much to say about resurrection, and unexpected new life, to be jammed into one Sunday, even if that Sunday is Easter.

Think of Easter Sunday as your first trip to a European city you've always wanted to visit, and finally get a chance to travel to. On that first visit you see all the high points, all the famous sites. For instance, that first time you go to Paris you might want to see the Louvre, or the Arc de Triumph, or the Eiffel tower. Easter is just like that. You hit all the high points of the story of Jesus's resurrection. You get the empty tomb with the stone rolled back, you get the women, you have the angel, you have the appearance of Jesus somewhere – on the road, as the gardener, in Galilee. You get Easter lilies and the hymn Christ the Lord Is Risen Today, and fancy Easter bonnets. And you leave feeling satisfied, like you got what you were looking for, what you needed.

But if you went back to Paris a second time, or stayed for two weeks, instead of just three days, there's a lot more you would see than just the tourist destinations. You might even buy a tour guide that promised to show you the 'real' Paris, to show you the sites off the beaten track, the places only known to lifelong Parisians.

Here we are in the second Sunday after Easter, here we are beginning the journey of Eastertide, and maybe we've had our fill of the type of Easter we've known all of our lives, maybe we are longing for an experience of the resurrection that is off our beaten track.

And boy, oh boy, didn't the story we just heard from Matthew deliver big time! Here's a resurrection story that you'll never hear on Easter Sunday, because it tells us that Jesus is not the only one who has been resurrected, and that resurrection didn't wait until Easter. It was already busting out of the tomb on what we call Good Friday.

Our tradition often portrays resurrection as if God entered history on Easter morning and resurrected a man she had called her beloved during his baptism, and had called her Son on a mountaintop when he was transfigured by a divine light. Our tradition may make us believe Jesus is resurrected because he was special, and different from you and me. And so the images we are often shown on Easter are of a solitary man, carrying the wounds of his crucifixion, who is always to us the Other, always portrayed as separated and removed. And the subtext of this is that resurrection is also special and separate and removed from our experience.

But I thank God there is not just one Christianity, but many Christianities, many experiences, and perspectives of the meaning of something like the resurrection. And so, on this second Sunday of Easter, I invite us to move beyond the image of the resurrection we might be familiar with, and open ourselves to the image of Easter held by our brothers and sisters in the Eastern Church. I invite us to move beyond an Easter of where we experience the must-see events of a Protestant resurrection, and take up the guide book of Orthodox Christianity, which will bring us to insights about the resurrection we may never have known existed.

[Martha, could you share the icon of the resurrection?]

Here is a version of the icon of Christ's resurrection that has graced churches and manuscripts from the Orthodox tradition since the 9th century. This is how Eastern Christians picture the story of Christ's rising, and its meaning. And it is directly related to the odd story from Matthew, which was shared this morning.

Here is an image not of a solitary resurrection, but of a universal resurrection.

Here is an image of a risen Jesus pulling Adam and Eve, pulling the proto-humans from their graves. He pulls them from death and decay into the radiance of his presence. And on either side others await their turn at being pulled from their graves. On the left, we see David and Solomon crowned, and John the Baptist in his furry robe. On the right, there is Abel with his shepherd's crook. Below are the shattered doors and locks of death, which have no power anymore.

In the Eastern vision of resurrection Christ is not the passive recipient of new life. He is the active giver of new life, a gift he extends to all of the holy ones who lived before, and a promise he offers to all of us. Adam and Eve aren't just historical figures. They are symbols for all of humanity, in every time and place. And we hear the echo of this understanding of a universal resurrection in the story of the dead pouring out of the tombs in Jerusalem on Good Friday. Resurrection is for all of the holy. Resurrection is not just for kings. Not just for Jesus. Not just for the first humans made by God's own hands. And it doesn't have to wait for Easter. Resurrection is our story, and it is bound up with love.

Our spiritual ancestors tell us that the ones raised in Jerusalem were the holy ones. The icon we have been looking at shows the heads of all of those being pulled from the graves

irradiated by halos of light, marking them as holy. Resurrection, in this vision, is a universal potentiality of all humanity, but it seems like it is only experienced by those called holy.

When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment he responded it was to love God with everything you have, and then love each other in just the same way. To be holy in Jesus's vision of life is to love. It is to live unselfishly and joyfully. It is to live by the heart, and not just the mind. To live in this way is to live beyond the cross, and beyond death, and beyond all endings. It is to say to look life right in the face, with all of its blessings and all of its heartbreak and to say simply, and yet so profoundly: Yes! To live according to love is to experience resurrection not at the end of time, but in the life of the here, and now. Just like those people who burst out of their tombs in Jerusalem on Good Friday. They didn't wait, and we don't have to either.

Alleluia!

Christ is risen.

Amen.