

EASTER
SUNDAY

The Rev.
Stephanie
E. Parker

Easter Sunday 2012
The Rev. Stephanie E. Parker

All Loves Excelling

Earlier this week I attended a worship service at which the Bishop was preaching to what was primarily a gathering of clergy. And he opened with a very funny quote from someone who said, "Well there were only two things I ever learned from going Church. The first is that God loved me *and* I am going to straight to hell, and the second is that sex is the most horrible thing ever, so I should save it for someone I love the most."

Now of course we all laughed and laughed, but in our heart of hearts we also had to grimace because while all denominations do not have that as their central message, as a whole we have to say that Christianity is guilty as charged!

We are guilty of avoiding the exhausting and difficult work of love and reconciliation to which Jesus really calls us and so instead, with some excellent sleight of hand, we like to redirect your attention. We serve up confusing and contradictory messages to attempt to arouse your fear and emotion so you don't notice we might not know what we are talking about.

But the Resurrection, which we celebrate on this glorious day, tells us once and for all that God's love for us is not based on what we do or especially on what we fail to do. The resurrection is proof positive that the love of God always liberates and never oppresses. The resurrection marks a breaking point in human history that calls us to rejoice that God's deepest hope for the human family is that we will have a full and joyful life.

A full and joyful life is not defined as never suffering or falling short or getting it wrong---whatever "it" is. A full and joyful life is defined by how many times we choose to believe in hope and second chances when common sense would simply tell us to throw in the towel and let any hope for new life or redemption die once and for all.

Resurrection is an act of divine love which offers God's final word to suffering, failure, and death; God says, no more can death keep us in the grave! Today the power of darkness is put to flight and a radical new vision of life and faith is placed before us.

In this new life fear no longer holds us in its grip. Easter morning calls us into song and moves us into a resounding alleluia! Easter calls us from death to life and Easter is God's invitation to believe that we are loved beyond measure.

A great victory has been won and none of us need ever be afraid again.

The challenge for us is to trust in God's promise and simply surrender to the steady throb of life that is God's divine spark within each of us.

We all know that sometimes the struggles of our lives drown out that life giving hope and we, like Mary at the tomb this morning, are reluctant to believe.

"Woman, why are you weeping?" Jesus tenderly asks her. "Well because all hope is lost and my beloved master is dead---and now I find that his body has been stolen---is there anyone here who can help me? Do you know where they have taken my Lord?"

I think that all of us gathered here this morning understand Mary's panic and sorrow. Most of us probably have some experience with feelings of defeat, hopelessness and panicked fear---especially in these current challenging times. Sometimes the power of the world to snatch away from us all that we hold dear seems ever-present. Mary's heart is broken and she is sure that her life will never ever be the same again---and she is right. But not in the way she thinks.

She is living in the fear that everything good has been defeated and that there is nothing left but to cling to the corpse of what once was. She thinks the power of the world has just had the last word, but she is about to learn that the power of God has the final say.

This is the true power that Easter reveals. Easter reveals the power of God---and more than that Easter reveals that no matter what the evidence to the contrary, the power of God always, and I said ALWAYS triumphs over the power of evil and death.

You see this is our seed of hope! This is the life that Christ has won for us. The risen Christ breaks forth from the tomb this morning and says, "My children, my beloved, do not weep for what you think is dead and buried. Believe in me. Follow me out of death into life. Do not cling to the memory of what you fear has been lost or stolen and get ready for a whole new beginning.

Now this is not to say that the pain and the darkness of the tomb is not a reality. The resurrection does not deny that suffering is painfully real nor does it scoff at our grief and pain---there is no mercy or grace in that. How could we trust a God who had no understanding of our suffering and fear? What a cold reality that would be.

But thankfully this *is not* our reality. Jesus' death on the cross matters precisely because *it was* real and because it broke God's heart. I have no doubt that the nails that pierced Jesus' hands and feet were driven straight into the heart of God.

But God's desire for us to know true love, true joy and true peace cannot be defeated---not even by our own rejection God's love---- and thankfully not by any feeble preaching and teaching of the Church in those times it fails to live into its full potential.

I for one am relieved that even the worst that religion can do is no match for the power of the love of God. Resurrection teaches us that we always get a second chance---a second chance that spins out to infinity. God never gives up on us.

This is our Easter promise; this is God's divine and lovely answer to God's confused and scattered people.

In Christ God gives *all* of us access to the strength of that transformative, tomb-shattering love. Easter day is a call to freedom and hope.

This bright morning we receive the invitation to bid farewell to our fear of death in all its forms. It is also our invitation to put away any fear of God---- once and for all.

Resurrection is our invitation to laugh, to love, to cry and to rise again and again from each big or little death we might suffer. Easter is our invitation to move through every aspect of our lives with a song of alleluia on our lips so clear and so compelling that others simply cannot resist joining us in its joyful refrain.

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

The Rev. Stephanie E. Parker
St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Seattle
www.ststephens-seattle.org