

SERMON: EASTER DAY 2022- A New Creation

Isaiah 65. 17-25; Hymn to the Risen Christ; Acts 10. 34-43; John 20. 1-18

Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed!

What a privilege to stand before you on this most sacred of days in our Christian worship. The time of soulful reflection during Lent is over. The Easter Season of rejoicing is here!

Let us celebrate as Verse 18 of our Isaiah reading tells us to!

“But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.”

The last verse 25 describes how even the animal kingdom will live in peace together. It is a direct reference to an earlier passage in Isaiah 11 verses 6-9 where the same harmony in the natural world is envisioned. And here this restored creation is premised on the arrival of the Messianic King. This person will come from the line of David and verse 11.2 tells us that : *“The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord.”*

This prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus. The birth, death and resurrection of our Lord has caused a new creation to begin on this earth. It is of course blatantly obvious that this restoration is not yet complete. The international conflicts, the devastating impacts of climate change and the inequities that happen across the globe and our own personal failings are all testimony of that. And yet our absolute conviction lies in that one day this will all end. The Hymn of the Risen Christ summarises this conviction: today we celebrate Christ’s sacrifice for us. In rising from the dead he opened the way for us to be “dead to sin” and “alive to God”. Alleluia! As I consider our New Testament readings I invite you to reflect on what being part of God’s New Creation means for you?

Our gospel account is on the one hand deeply familiar and on the other surprisingly revealing. In it we have three main characters. The basic account we have heard many times. Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb in the dark at the earliest possible time she could under Jewish law. She is shocked to see the stone removed so runs back to raise the alarm to Simon Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved. Although Peter arrives after the other disciple he is the first to enter the tomb. When he does verses 6b and 7 tell us that *“He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.”*

The Greek verb used here for “saw” provides a first revelation. The word implies a somewhat detached viewing of what was before him. He observed the scene and assessed its meaning. Various theories have been proffered as to the nature of this assessment. One is that the neatness of the linen placement surely meant this was no ordinary robbery. A second, the head wrapping was removed. This wouldn’t have been necessary if Jesus’ resurrection was purely spiritual: he would have simply passed through the cloth. The separation of the head linen indicates a physical resurrection. Then the other disciple went in. His reaction is very different. Verse 8 tells us “he also went in, and he saw and believed.” And this is the second surprise revelation. The verb for “saw” used here is very different. It means to see something with an inward spiritual perception. It was that deeper perception through which God was able to bless this disciple with the faith that Jesus was raised from the dead, as his Son and the Messiah. From his love he was given faith. This was done even though verse 9 tells us: *“for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.”* This, I suspect, is the meaning of the expression: “faith seeking understanding” – we are first persuaded by our Lord then we seek to understand its meaning. It was St Anselm, the Arch Bishop of Canterbury from 1093 to 1109 who famously said; *“And I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but believe that I might understand. For this too I believe, since, unless I first believe, I shall not understand”*

As the gospel account continues in verse 11, the two men leave, but Mary stays weeping outside the tomb. It will be rare indeed if we have not experienced the pain of losing a loved one. Our mourning comes unbidden. So it was for Mary. The thought of someone having desecrated her beloved Jesus’ body was unbearable. From this love, Mary was given the honour of being the first person to see the Risen Christ. When Jesus calls out her name, it is all she needs to recognise him as her precious Teacher. Perhaps it was the desperation in her voice as she says: “Rabbouni” that causes Jesus to respond in verse 17: “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father.” Again, it’s natural isn’t it, to want to cling tight to the person we love. We can do this both physically and emotionally. But Mary had a vital role to play and to achieve it Jesus needed her to let go of the old Jesus she once knew and to accept that a new creation, a new Adam had Risen. Jesus gave Mary the task of being the first witness of this new creation through his resurrection. Verse 17 continues with Jesus telling Mary to “go to my brothers and sisters and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” One more point of

revelation in this verse is that the type of verb used for “go” means “to continue to go”. So going to the disciples was just the beginning of the mission given to Mary. This mission also reveals that something dramatically new was afoot. Women were not allowed to be legal witnesses in Jewish society. But here Jesus ignores that prohibition and gives a woman the vital role of witnessing to his resurrection.

A further revelation is that the two people the bible describes as most loving Jesus are the same two who give the greatest witness to Christ’s resurrection. The disciple testifies that from our love for Jesus faith can flow. Mary’s love enables her to testify to the historical reality of the resurrection and to Jesus’ ascension to his Father and our Father. She does this first to the disciples and then to many others in her time and ever since through this scripture.

Though Peter plays a small part in this Gospel account, once the Holy Spirit is released, he too becomes a powerful witness to the Risen Lord. Our reading from Acts 10 makes that clear. In verses 39- 41 he declares that those chosen by God are indeed witnesses to Jesus’ raising from the dead. The power of the resurrection through the Cross is the centre of Christian faith. Just as Jesus became a new creation, every person who accepts him as their saviour becomes a new creation also. The heart of Easter is this: believers in Jesus are a people swept up with Him into a new agenda, a new adventure, a new purpose for living. Far from a staid, dull existence it is a roller coaster ride to victory!

At the beginning of this sermon I asked what being part of God’s New Creation means for you? Would anyone like to share their thoughts on this?

For me it means:

- Knowing God’s love, John 3.16-17: *“That God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life”* (experience at Good Friday service)
- Accepting Jesus’ forgiveness.
- Being friends with Jesus
- Living in sure certainty of the final New Creation
- Joyfully thanking and praising God for his blessings in our lives
- Choosing prayerfully the things I do and say
- Witnessing to Jesus through loving actions
- Serving our community in humility

If this sounds like the kind of faith experience you feel moved to discover more about then please reach out while you are here or wherever you feel comfortable to do so. Our Father is longing to have a deeper relationship with each one of us.

As I conclude, may it be emblazoned on our hearts that we are part of our Father's New Creation; that we are people of the resurrection! Let us live our lives knowing this rich blessing bestowed upon us by the glorious resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus!

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