

Yr. A, Easter Day
March 23, 2008
Preached by Furman Buchanan
St. Martins in the Fields
994 words

Lessons:
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
Acts 10:34-43
Colossians 3:1-4
John 20:1-18

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

“I have seen the Lord!”

This simple, clear and yet—unbelievable—statement from Mary Magdalene was the very first Easter sermon.

Breathless from fear and anxiety, from running back and forth searching for the other disciples, from the sheer excitement at the touch of her dear friend and teacher, at the sound of his tender voice calling her by name and giving her such important work to do. It is a miracle she was able to speak at all.

I can honestly say—this is not how I would have chosen to reveal the resurrection.

In the ancient world, the word of a single woman would hardly satisfy a court of law as a witness testimony to something *credible*. Yet, when the God of heaven and earth chose to reveal something that was positively *incredible*, he chose none other than a single woman. And not just any woman, but a woman who had been known by the general public as someone possessed with *seven* evil spirits¹...or, to use our language, she exhibited symptoms of a *profound* mental illness.

You do not need to be a public relations professional—like I used to be—in order to see that this is no way to reveal the resurrection. This is no way to reveal what we believe is the central, most important act of God in the history of the world.

The surprise in all this is not so much that we are willing to trust that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. The true surprise is that Jesus was (and is) willing to trust us with this powerful and sacred mystery.

Why wouldn't Jesus make his first appearance among the crowds of people still overflowing in the streets of Jerusalem? Or better yet, slip into Pontius Pilate's breakfast room for a bit of tea, and a chat about how he might get a little appointment with the Emperor to explain who it is that is *really* in charge. Or better yet, show up in the Temple before the chief priests and elders and watch all those faces as you smile and say, “I'm back!”

Instead, we get one person, with a history of mental instability, telling a few other people what *she* could hardly believe herself...“I have seen the Lord!”

St. Paul scratched his head about this foolishness too, and finally he just accepted the stupefying trust that God places in our hands as human partners. He described it this way in his letter to the Corinthians, “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world...”²

Yes, the surprising thing is not so much that we are willing to trust that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. The true surprise is that Jesus is willing to trust us with this powerful and sacred mystery.

This flower-filled cross on the floor is a perfect symbol of the resurrection and the incredible trust that God has handed over to us as participants in this powerful and sacred mystery.

¹ Luke 8:2

² 1 Corinthians 1:27-28

All of the work of salvation was accomplished by Christ, and the cross conveys the depths to which he was willing to go for the sake of his merciful love.

Yet, all of the work of sharing this news—and this love—has been entrusted to us, and this conveys the positively stunning lengths to which he was willing to go for the sake of trusting those he loves.

We receive this empty cross which testifies to the work that has been accomplished, and we also receive this tremendous privilege of giving it living color and beauty—right here, today! We are given the remarkable honor of sharing in Christ’s work by loving one another as Christ first loved us.

So how do we do this?

When *you* participate in the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers, it is like bringing the beauty of your presence and adding it to an otherwise empty cross. When you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, it is like offering a local flower, like an Azalea to an otherwise empty cross. When you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself, it is like placing the most precious bounty of roses in an otherwise empty cross. When you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being, it like bringing lilies to an otherwise empty cross.³

St. Paul put it this way in his letter to the Colossians that we heard a moment ago: “Since you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is... Set your minds on things that are above... When Christ—who is your life—is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.”⁴

This glory gets revealed in the most astonishing ways... like a woman with hardly a shred of credibility saying, “I have seen the Lord.” Or like the preaching of people such as you and me, sharing—by word and by deed—the love of Christ in the world today. Or like this symbol of torture and death, which turns out to be a thing of beauty, after all.

I can honestly say—this is not how I would have chosen to reveal the resurrection. I don’t trust anyone, especially myself, with that kind of awesome responsibility.

But the Good News is that God *does* trust us—and love us—just that much.

It is, therefore, with grateful and joyful hearts that we join the likes of Mary Magdalene, with patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs, and all the saints from ages past as we continue to proclaim:

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

(The Congregation responds) The Lord is risen, indeed. Alleluia!

Amen.

³ These aspects of fidelity are drawn from the baptismal promises, Book of Common Prayer, p. 304-305.

⁴ Colossians 3:1-4