

March 31, 2024 Easter

Pr. Steve

Texts: Isaiah 25: 6-9; Colossians 1: 15-20; Mark 16: 1-8

*Christ is risen. Alleluia!*

That is how the Gospel of Mark ends—they were “*frightened out of their minds, ran away, and said nothing to anyone*” [Mark 16:8]. First impression of Easter...hmmm.

There is nothing we want more than to feel alive. Am I right? Oh, if just one day this next week, I could feel alive—like I wanted when I was a kid—you know, that energy, that joy, that just creativity of 'being me,' isn't it so much fun? Almost didn't make it there.

And God wants it more than we do for us to be alive. That is God's deepest pleasure and treasure that is the fulfilling of the creation that we would feel we belong here, and we matter, and the inside of us matches up with the outside of us, and life is good. And God will do whatever it takes to make that happen. *If you need chickens in worship, God will do it.* [There was a chicken for Easter Children's Time!] God will deliver no matter what.

On his final journey to Jerusalem, when Jesus saw the great city before him, he broke down and wept, and he said, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, would that you knew the things that make for peace.*" (You don't.) And everything in that final week of Jesus—and that final culmination of his Crucifixion—is about the making of peace with us and for us.

The cross is the heart of God. The cross is the vulnerability of God. The great mystery we hunger for is not out there somewhere beyond the stellar vastness of the cosmos. The mystery is that God is open to us, affirms us, loves us—here and now, where we are, as we are—we are loved, especially when we don't even love ourselves. *(There's only one person like that in our midst this morning. All the rest of us just love ourselves all the time, don't we? Let's pray for that one.)*

We want it so much. God comes to deliver it, for love heals, and unites, and draws together. Love is not what God does. Love is who God is—and who wants to give that to us because God can only be known through loving. Nothing else, nothing else stirs the heart—that deep down connection of who we are. Only love brings us to life.

I heard a therapist say some years ago, *'You know, therapy has been around for a hundred years now. And life is worse!'* The only thing that changes people is love, to love ourselves, to love others. That's the only thing that changes and heals people.

In the Colossians text today [Colossians 1: 15-20], in this ancient hymn of the Church, it says that the crucified Christ is the image of the invisible God. The crucified Christ is the expression, the experience, the image of the invisible God. This is who God is. God is like this.

And this is not passive. Friends, this is the embrace of grace, the embrace of us as we are, the embrace of the whole of humanity and the creation.

And now, it includes too the embrace of death. Death is no longer the final word, the ultimate solution, the one to whom we owe obedience. 'O death, don't persecute us!' Death now belongs

to God. And that crucified love, that resurrecting love says, *'If death belongs to God, friends, there is nothing we need fear any longer.'*

We're invited to live into the beauty, and the creativity, the joy of who we are—to take those risks of loving, to become those deep-down longings of the heart that we carry inside. Go for it. Live into it. Forever and a day you belong to God, and you belong to this Love. It will not cease. And you can live into the storms of life as well—Live as passionately, extravagantly, and as wastefully as God. (Can I get an Amen?)

Because, you see, love is reckless. Love is not a strategic plan. *'we're going to conquer life here today, people, follow me.'* Oh come on! It's the openness of heart. It's the beauty of who you already are. It is this deep-down affirmation of a compassion that knows no end, and to which we're invited to live our lives. God is love—and loving. God is not infinite power. That's what the world screams, doesn't it? *'Obey power. Submit to power.'* Yeah, there's a clashing. But God is that love, loving us from the depths.

And God is raising up today a New Humanity—not a new religion. No, we don't need another religion. God is raising up a 'new humanity' with all of us, with the creation, with the earth. God is raising up all that is—into this New Life.

(And if you want to learn more about this, it's called the *bar anasha*, the New Humanity, which expands far beyond the boundaries of the Church. It includes people of all the earth, all the faiths. It's for all of us. If you want to learn more about it, come back next Sunday, when it's Easter pt.2. There is so much to share, I can't get it all in today.)

Jesus is a whole-maker. He draws together all that's divided and disfigured, fragmented and fractured, broken down, excised, cut out, cut off. He draws together, again and again, all of us. And we are invited to participate. If we open up a little room in the heart, this is where God wants to live—inside of each one of us. Yes, yes inside of you, each of us.

Each of you are God's favorite temple. You know that? And you are in seated inside of a group of sacred temples this morning. Look around. This is sanctity at work. And we look and we go, 'Oh, no!'

This is it—the messiness of who we are. All of us belongs to God now. And that is our sacred prayer on Easter, *"O God, bless the mess—the messiness of my life, the messiness of my family, the messiness of my church, the messiness of my community, the messiness of these times, blessed God, because only you can see us through with the depth, and the clarity, the wisdom, and the joy, the aliveness, that we're hungering for here and now"*.

And that is the gift of Easter to all of us. Thanks be to God.  
Amen.

Christ is risen. Christ is rising. We are rising. Alleluia!