



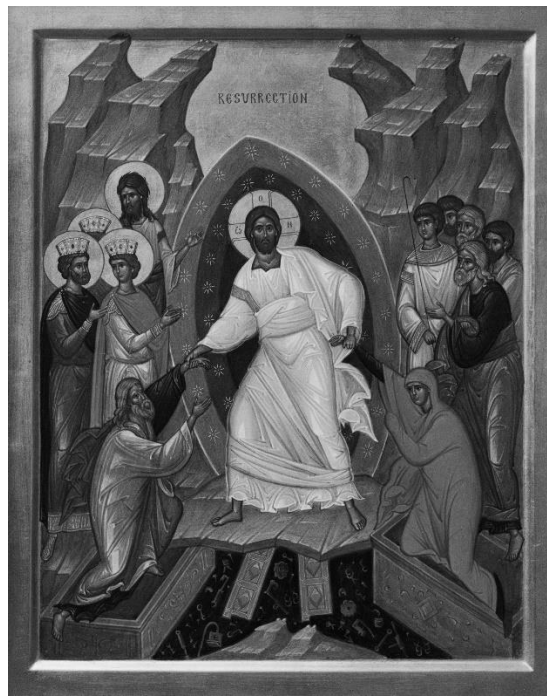
SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

THE VERY REV. STEVEN L. THOMASON, DEAN AND RECTOR

EASTER DAY MARCH 31, 2024,

ISAIAH 25: 6-9; PSALM 118:1-2, 14-24; ACTS 10:34-43; JOHN 20:1-18

PRACTICING RESURRECTION



Did you hear the one about the woman who called for an Uber? The driver said good morning as she climbed into the back seat, but then returned to his quiet realm in the front, a world away it seemed.

After some time, the woman said something to the driver, but he did not answer. She reached

forward and touched his shoulder to get his attention. He jumped with surprise, the car swerved then corrected. He let out a sigh and slight chuckle before acknowledging her: Sorry, mam, you startled me: today is my first day on the job after retiring from 30 years as a hearse driver.

Happy Easter!

The day on which Jesus rises from the dead!

For many of us in modernity, it seems an odd thing to consider. Miraculous acts of God generally, and resurrection specifically. It does not compute. We are more inclined these days to engage the genre of science fiction where zombies wreak havoc, and heroes work out their destinies. We are up to something very different here today.

Nearly a century ago theologian Rudolf Bultmann famously asked how “modern” people could possibly believe in miracles in the age of the “wireless.” From radios to television to computers and the internet, and now AI, I suppose the question is more about what makes a people “modern,” than about miracles. Modernity will always seem to be our time (whoever “we” are in any given moment).¹

It seems reasonable to expect that every generation has questioned the resurrection of Christ in their own time, in their own way. Perhaps it would have been better had the Risen Jesus appeared to Pontius Pilate or to the high priest Caiaphas. I would love to have seen their reactions!

If the resurrection were meant to be an historically verifiable event, then God would not have brought it about in the wee hours of

the morning with no eyewitnesses. None of the gospels tell us exactly how it happened. Did the earth quake in the moment, or were the birds singing their morning cheer? Did Jesus arise limber and fresh, or did he struggle in stiffness to get his burial wraps off? Was it a cool morning, or unseasonably warm? We don’t know. We weren’t there. No one was.

The best we get are a few post-resurrection sightings, and these only to the closest circle of allies, hardly an objective bunch: first to Mary Magdalene in the garden, and then to selected disciples, on a few occasions over several weeks. Then no more.

And yet today, we say it happened, the resurrection, even though it cannot be proven, or disproven for that matter. And we claim that this resurrection hope is held for us as well, even if we cannot comprehend it fully on this side of the grave.

Why is it that we stake our claim with resurrection so resolutely, even as modern people of faith?

With all that besets our modern world these days—wars, social decay and unjust suffering—it seems we yearn nevertheless to discover divine presence and the promise of new life amidst the shadowy haunts of life. Perhaps it is because we have seen the effects of

¹ Some of the exegetical themes here are drawn from an essay by Rick Lischer in [The Christian Century](#), March 17, 1999 issue, accessed March 26, 2024.

resurrection, and we want to experience it as well.

Mary Magdalene, on brief chat with her risen rabbouni, is transfigured from mourning into dancing. Two travelers on their way to Emmaus attest that their hearts burned with joy while they were talking with an as yet unrecognized Risen Jesus.

Modern author Marianne Sawicki maintains that the Church is really, at its core, a community of people with competence to recognize the Risen Jesus, to see resurrection in our midst.²

So how do we do that?

Well, first, I have to say: Resurrection is not a thought experiment (it will thwart every attempt to make it so, or it will frustrate any who try to harness it as such). We don't think ourselves into new ways of living; we live ourselves into new ways of thinking.

The biblical word in Greek which we translate as resurrection is *anastasis*—literally, the opposite of “stasis.” Life, by definition, is movement. We live and move and have our being by practicing resurrection. It turns mourning into dancing. It makes our hearts burn with joy.

Practicing resurrection is what we do, as followers of Christ—practicing, because we are never quite able to fully apprehend it in our

own time, but neither are we bereft of opportunities to see resurrection in our midst.

One of my favorite authors, Wendell Berry, turns poetic on this topic. He draws on nine decades of living in tune with creation, moving by the sensory flows of life on a farm. He smells mystery in the soil that liberates the seed from its wintry tomb; he tastes joy as the sap of his blood rises when the earth rounds the long night bend and hurtles toward the sun once more; he hears the whispered prayers of his ancestors as he gathers eggs from the henhouse.

In his poem [Manifesto](#), Berry imagines a transformation from the mundane experience of everyday life by practicing presence in the little things, the common things, and tending to them as special. And look for the paradox, the counter-intuitive, and there you will likely find rich fodder for resurrection life.

Here are a few lines: “So, friends, everyday do something that won't compute. Love the Lord. Love the world...Love someone who does not deserve it...Ask the questions that have no answers. Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias...”³

He ends with the imperative plea to “practice resurrection!”

Practicing resurrection is about unfolding into a deeper awareness of the mystery of life as a

² As cited in Lischer's article.

³ Berry. <https://www.context.org/iclib/ic30/berry/>

gift from God, who has invested in us across millennia of modernities, not because it made any sense to do so, but out of sheer steadfast love which could do no other.

One need not ascribe to some doctrinal definition of resurrection to know in their stiff bones that it is true, that it is real. We Christians imbed this truth in the person and story of Jesus, and we rejoice in the gift he was, and is, and will yet be to the world, but in the mysteries of God, who is unshackled by the bounds of human time, we can say with confidence and great comfort that God has been practicing resurrection all along, is now, and always will be—for our sakes.

And so, as Berry encourages, “be joyful though you have considered all the facts.”

John 20:1-18 *[Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. 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. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.]*

Practice presence in the midst of life. Look for the beauty lithely passing by you, causing a wisp of moving air to light on your cheek. Let the signs of new life startle you awake. Celebrate the love that melts your heart. Long for the peace which passes all understanding; look for it on the face of one whom you encounter with a smile, trust that such peace rides on the long arc of the universe that bends toward God's new creation and hitch a ride with it.

Happy Easter, dear friends!

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

The Lord is Risen indeed! Alleluia!