

Easter 2b 2021  
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC  
April 11, 2021  
The Rev. Catherine L. Tatem

Acts 4:30-35 Psalm 133

1 John 1:1-2:2 John 20:19-31

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!]

What do we do with our encounters of the risen Christ? Peter and the other disciple saw the burial garments in an otherwise empty tomb, and their response was to go home. A little later, they gathered, feeling alone and afraid.

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear (of the Jews), Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

Thomas did not see a sign of the risen One until later, and even seeing the risen Jesus in his resurrected flesh, Thomas reached out his hand to make sure there was evidence that he could believe.

Mary Magdalene (Mary of the town of Magdala), is not a very credible witness. In those days, women in general were not considered credible witnesses ... and this Mary is the one from whom Jesus expelled seven (7!) demons. A woman, a woman who had been filled with demons ... who is she to be our first eye witness to the resurrection? She is whom God chose first to tell of the Good News of the resurrection. This unlikely apostle is good news for us – with a bunch of rugged fishermen as followers, demons and ultimate outsiders who consistently recognized Jesus, why – there might be room for us to follow Jesus, too. We might be exactly the ones to tell Jesus' story, changing our shouts of "crucify!" to "testify," in quieter, joy-filled voices.

What do we do with our encounters with the risen Christ? We who have longed for "alleluias" and springtime, joyful resurrection – after last Sunday's grand, grand celebration, we, too, went home. We have come back, gathered not in fear, but in hopeful joy. As we enter our Easter life, new life, we will soon join baby Ivy Ann in her new life. Her parents, godparents and every person here is witness to her rising to new life in Christ. As on Easter Day, we say "Welcome happy morning!" and promise to help her live into her baptismal covenant.

Covenant is a hefty, rather ancient word, not one we use much today. A covenant is an agreement between two parties, and the one with power always initiates it. In baptism that means that it is God who initiates our baptismal covenant. Think about that for a minute ... it is God who initiates our baptismal covenant. We respond to what God offers. Baptism is not insurance against eternal hell; baptism is our joyful response and commitment to God pouring out God's love upon us.

Each party to a covenant has responsibilities. Parents and godparents, you are promising on this child's behalf to help her know Jesus as her Lord and Savior, to help her grow "in full stature" to her life in Christ. This will take care, attention, strength, and more love than we can imagine. The "more love" part is God, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, as we walk with you on this path.

None of us is finished, and <alleluia!> God is not finished with us, either. Our full stature in Christ is something that we must practice every single day; if there is going to be change in ourselves and in the world, that change is in us and made through us. We are the ones now to make real the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Welcome, Ivy Ann, welcome, everyone here, to resurrection.

It is resurrection life that the words in 1 John describe so very well. These are our words for our easing out of pandemic life:

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life-- this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us-- we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.

Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, and in him there is light. We are now the bearers of the light, and because we have died and risen with Christ, life is new. I suspect that Lazarus lived differently when he walked out of his tomb, out of the burial garments that he no longer needed. And people want to know his story: you're alive! What is it like to walk into life all over again? We share the stories of our life with Jesus - share these stories with Ivy, with big brother Ronan, with everyone you meet, by what you do, say, and live.

There is more to living into resurrection. If we insist on holding onto life as was, we risk missing opportunities to see what God is doing now. Where are the whispers and winds of the Holy Spirit? We have a chance to move forward in ways that we have not yet imagined. Jesus will lead us. Come, Lord Jesus, that we might live anew, bringing your Good News into the world. Let Ivy and Ronan grow up in a world in which all things are new, in which your will is done on earth (as it is in heaven). Be with us Lord Jesus, in Easter.