

**Easter Day - John 20:1-18**  
**St Andrew's Episcopal Church - Sedona, AZ**

***Living a Resurrected Life***

Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia! What a joyful proclamation. Full of life, happiness, hope, and faith. I wonder how we come to proclaim this Good News with such joy and enthusiasm. I wonder how we come to believe in the Resurrection. Has your faith in the living Body of Christ grown and been nurtured for a long time, or only just recently? Has your faith disappeared and reappeared at different times in your life? What sustains your faith amidst the uncertainty and certainty of change? Do you continue to wonder, and explore, and discover doubt in faith, and faith in doubt?

Recently I came across a list of questions that researchers developed to help assess how congregations profess their beliefs and live into their shared ministries at church and in the world. One of the questions that stood out for me was about the Resurrection. It asked respondents to rank on a scale from 0 to 5 where they fall on the continuum of disbelief, wavering belief and absolute belief in the Resurrection. What do you believe? Are you, like Mary, both excited and confounded by the Resurrection, and wondering who Jesus is for us now? How do our lives become so transformed that we announce with certainty that the Risen Lord is in our midst?

Over two millennia ago, Mary Magdalene approached the tomb where the crucified Jesus had been laid to rest. Through tears of grief she expected to offer prayers of devotion right near the large tomb stone that separated her from the dead body of her Lord. She arrived before sunrise and probably had very little sleep after witnessing the horrifying event at Gologtha. John's gospel does not indicate that Mary said anything upon her arrival there. Apparently, she was speechless when she saw that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb. No joyous shouts of "Alleluia, Christ is risen!" No, not yet.

I imagine that Mary was experiencing multiple emotions; perhaps shock, disbelief, fear, and despair. What could possibly have happened to Jesus' body? She assumes that other people have taken the body of her Lord out of the tomb and laid him elsewhere. But who, and why? Mary runs to tell Simon Peter and the other disciple, and they run to go and see for themselves, probably a bit apprehensive about what they might find. Both of the men enter the tomb and find only linen burial wrappings. Jesus' body is gone! John tells us that "the other disciple" saw and believed. But what did he believe? Did he believe what Mary had told them, that someone had taken away Jesus' body? John wrote that the disciples did not yet understand the scripture, that Jesus must rise from the dead. So, did the disciples come to believe in the Resurrection only after they experienced Jesus' presence in his post-

resurrection appearances? The men returned to their homes saying nothing. No shouts of “Alleluia, Christ is risen!” No, not yet.

Have you ever tried to believe something was true because you really wanted it to be true?

Have you ever believed something was true because that is what you were taught by someone you respected and trusted?

Does it take a long time for you to believe something is true? Does evidence help you believe?

Have there been times when you believed something was true in your heart before you believed it in your mind?

Have you ever noticed that, in the ambiguity of our uncomprehending eyes and minds, the Holy Spirit opens our hearts to the mystery of God’s abiding presence?

Perhaps that is what happened with Mary as she stayed at the tomb weeping. Like Mary, we have experienced times when we have needed to cry and let our tears wash away some of our anguish. And sometimes after weeping, we have been able to see life from a new perspective.

When Mary bent over to look into the tomb, did she expect to see and believe as the other disciple had? What was she looking for? Whatever she thought or hoped for at that moment was nothing like what happened next. First, she sees and speaks with two angels about Jesus’ missing body. And

then, still lost in grief and distress, Mary turns around only to be greeted by the unexpected. By then, she does not expect to see the body of Jesus, dead or alive. But that is who appears. At first, she does not recognize him, but when Jesus calls her name everything changes. It is in that moment when Jesus sees Mary and Mary sees Jesus that resurrection becomes a reality. It is in that moment of seeing and being seen, hearing and being heard, knowing and being known that Mary is resurrected by her risen Lord and renewed with new hope, new joy, and new life. But just when Mary realizes that resurrection is a reality, a different kind of reality sinks in. The Jesus that she knew and loved before is different, yet somehow the same. The Jesus that she wants to hold onto again, cannot be held as before. The Jesus that appeared on earth as a human being will appear in new ways as the Risen Christ.

Just as Jesus embodies resurrection and new life, he invites us to join him in living resurrected lives. Over and over again. Resurrection means new life; and new life involves transformation and change. As much as we may feel comforted and comfortable with the Jesus we knew as a child, Jesus invites us to move through the discomfort of change toward knowing him in new ways. Jesus invites us to live resurrected lives as the Living Body of Christ in every age and in every time. The church of our time looks and feels different than the church of our childhoods, or the church of our parents, or the church of our grandparents. Just as we come to know Jesus in different ways throughout

our lives, the Church, as the Living Body of Christ, grows and changes and is known in different ways and in different contexts. The St. Andrew's of the 1960s and 70s looked different than the St. Andrew's of the '80s and '90s. And the St. Andrew's at the turn of this millennia was different than the St. Andrew's that we are helping to shape at this time for our own lives and for the faithful of future generations.

In other Episcopal churches across the country and in our own diocese, we are experiencing Jesus showing up in different ways, and we are seeing the Church reappear in ways similar to how Jesus and his followers showed up two thousand years ago. Churches are expanding their ministries within and beyond the church walls. The church as the people of God is growing by being planted and cultivated in homes, in storefronts, in homeless shelters, in schools, in parks, in town squares, and even at places where people wash their laundry. Wherever there is a place for Jesus in people's hearts and a space for people to gather, the resurrected and living body of Christ is and will be there. Jesus may look different than we expect, but he is and will be with us.

Just as we have come to know the kind and compassionate face of Jesus to appear the same in some ways but different in others, we are coming to know the living Body of Christ as being both comforting and familiar, as well as challenging and new. We may not always like or agree with or even understand how Jesus shows up in our lives and in the church, but Jesus is

always calling us to view life from a new perspective. Jesus' perspective is so different from the ones we try to hold onto, that it requires letting go. Jesus' perspective is so different from the world we live in, that it demands death and resurrection.

Even though we come to know our Risen Lord in many different ways and through many different experiences, Jesus is always the same. Jesus is always present. Jesus always knows us. Jesus always loves us. How-ever we seek and find and be the living body of Christ, it is through his resurrection that we are raised to new life. And for that we can rejoice in saying, "Alleluia, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!"

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