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St. Barnabas Episcopal Church
Easter Sunday-Year C
April 4, 2010
Text: John 20:1-18

“I have seen the Lord!”

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

It was Good Friday morning and I was preparing to type the text for my first ever Easter sermon. I found myself intensely fixed on the blooms just outside my office window-unable to type, let alone think. It had been a long week. Between meeting and greeting, discovering new things and figuring out how things worked, answering emails and phone messages, focusing on Holy Week liturgies and preparing sermons I found myself exhausted! Happy and excited but exhausted nevertheless!

As I slowly came back to focus on the task at hand I began to imagine how spent Jesus' followers must have been after that fateful week: the anticipation and actual journey to Jerusalem for Passover, the preparation for what would be their last supper together with Jesus, the chaos that ensued in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus' trial and execution. Probably the worst week of their lives left them gripped by grief, fear and disbelief; that the One whom they had come to know and follow those three years, who had promised them joy and life in abundance now lay still in a tomb. What would life be without him now?

Early on the first day of the week, with a crushed spirit and heavy heart Mary Magdalene made her way to the tomb. She had seen firsthand the horror of Good Friday. She saw the One she loved make his way to Calvary's hill. She had seen him stripped and nailed to the cross. Mary was there when her Lord took his final breath. She saw where they had laid him. And now while it was still dark she saw that the stone had been rolled away. What has happened? Has someone stolen the Lord's body? Have they no shame? Sobbing she ran to tell Peter and the Beloved disciple. She can barely speak the words: “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him!” Sprinting to tomb Peter and the Beloved disciple see what Mary saw-an empty tomb. He is gone!

Peter and the Beloved Disciple leave and an exhausted and trembling, Mary is left alone to weep. Her sobs rock her to her very core and she cannot bear to leave. She has not the energy to move except to peer in once again to where Jesus had been laid. No one had been there before but now she encounters two angels in white. “Woman, why are you weeping?” “They have taken my Lord” she manages to say. Turning she encounters yet another figure who asks her the same question. “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Given the lack of light and sleep, and in distress Mary can only imagine that the person speaking to her is perhaps the gardener. Maybe he would know where they have taken Jesus. ‘If you have taken him, please give him to me. I will take care of him.’

Jesus then reveals himself in a single word. “Mary.” In that instant she knows the tomb was truly empty, that her Lord lives and she has seen him once again! “I have seen the Lord!” Mary tells the disciples. He lives!

For centuries many have called themselves looking for answers or explaining this extraordinary event away. We want to know what *really* happened early on that third day. But there was no witness of the moment when death was overcome and turned to life, when a dead body became a risen body. “Resurrection does not square with anything else we know about physical human life on earth.”* A person who dies and is buried simply does not get up and walk away! But something happened. God happened! Christ was raised from the dead by the mighty power of God.

It has been said that Easter began when the Gardener said “Mary” and she recognized him. For it was then that the miracle happened and kept on happening-not in an empty tomb but *in the encounter with the Living Lord*. The early witnesses experienced this for themselves as we heard in today’s first reading. Peter testified that, “They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.”

The message of Easter this morning is that we too live into the Easter faith not only because of the testimonies we have read about but because we have experienced for *ourselves* the Living Lord who is present even in our day. Christ is alive and dwells in our midst. He comes to us daily whether we are gathered in worship or distracted by the busyness of our individual lives. He comes to us even in our weariness and in life’s uncertainties.

And let us not forget that the Resurrection of Christ is our present strength and our hope. It is the guarantee of our own resurrection, clearly promised and affirmed in scripture, creeds and in our prayers. God's promise to us is that we are never abandoned to the grave. Death will not have the final say. Christ's Resurrection changed all that for all time. *Because He lives, we also shall live.*

Like those first witnesses, we are to witness to this same Good News that has been testified about, talked about, sung about and preached about for some 2,000 years. Family of St. Barnabas we have a witness to continue here in this community, this diocese, and wherever we find ourselves.

May we always be mindful and acknowledge the everyday resurrections that happen around us and to us, and in others. May we always be aware of the ongoing revelations of Christ's divine glory until we are brought into the full presence of the living Lord!

Happy Easter! Happy Resurrection Day!

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

*Barbara Brown Taylor's "Escape from the Tomb", Christian Century, 1998.