

All Things Are Become New

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

To understand this morning's Gospel reading, it's helpful to place yourself in the position of Mary Magdalene. On Friday afternoon, you would have watched Jesus – Jesus, who rescued you from sin; who cast out from you seven demons; who called you to be His disciple; whose ministry you'd supported; whose miracles you'd seen – this Jesus you saw hanging on a cross, bruised and bloody. You watched Him suffer the agony of that barbaric execution. You saw Him die. Later that evening you watched as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea took His body from the cross, carried it to the tomb, and laid it there. You watched as the stone was placed which would shut up your Lord in His resting place. Since that evening, you have been preparing the spices and ointments that you will use to prepare Jesus' body for its permanent burial – your last act of devotion to the Lord you loved.

Sunday morning, you leave while it is still dark with at least two other women; together you will anoint the Lord's body and leave Him to His rest. But when you come to the tomb, something has happened – the stone has been taken away from the tomb. In fear, you run to the gathering of disciples, telling them of your terrible uncertainty: where have they taken the Lord? You return to the tomb with Simon Peter and with John. You watch as the two of them gaze into the tomb, enter it, and leave it in amazement. They leave to go to their homes, but you remain behind – you cannot understand what has happened. You enter the tomb and have conversation with the two strangers inside. You turn to find a third stranger outside the tomb, and you ask, in desperation, where he has taken the Lord. But to your utter amazement, in spite of everything you've seen since Friday afternoon and everything you've known about the world, you find that this stranger

is the Lord, alive and in the flesh. You move to embrace Him in joy, terror, exaltation.

But Jesus says to you, “Do not cling to me.”

Why? Let us step out of Mary’s position and ask the question as observers. Why would Jesus forbid this woman, His dear disciple, to cling to Him? Isn’t this kind of clinging precisely what a Christian is supposed to do? Who should she cling to, if not to her Lord and God?

The answer lies in the second part of His sentence, “Do not cling to me, *for I have not yet ascended to the Father.*” Jesus’ words seem to indicate that Mary was expecting a return to the way things had been between her and Christ. She had known about others whom Jesus raised: Lazarus, the widow’s son, Jairus’ daughter. All of them returned to the lives they had known: eating, drinking, working, living with family, attending synagogue. Why should it not be the same for Jesus Himself? He’s risen! Now let us return to what we were doing before: to supporting His ministry, sharing the Gospel, witnessing His miracles. Let us rejoice in His visible, earthly presence with us. Let our old beloved life, our old friendship and discipleship, continue. Mary has seen, and is glad to have seen, that Jesus has been resuscitated – she has not yet grasped that He has been *resurrected*, with all that this entails. Jesus gently corrects her thinking. He is not going to abide with His disciples in the same way that He had. He is, in fact, going to ascend to the Father. He will not be absent from them, He had given them His promise that He would be with them whenever they gathered in His name, but His presence would take a different form.

You, of course, were not with Jesus during the days of His earthly ministry. You have only ever known Jesus’ presence as He comes through His Word and Sacraments. Yet it is still possible for you to commit the same error as Mary Magdalene. You can fail to believe in the change that Jesus’ resurrection has

brought, not only to His presence with His disciples, but to the whole creation. You can adhere to the values, beliefs, and uses of this world, and seek God only as a source of contentment and a happy life – or even as a source of health, wealth, and success. You can see Jesus, not as your Savior and God, but only as a great teacher, an inspirational figure, a bringer of emotional comfort or affection. To cling to Jesus in this way is to cling to Him “after the flesh,” as Paul says.

It is this kind of clinging which Jesus rebukes in Mary, and which He rebukes in all of us. Jesus did not come to re-affirm the pattern of our sin-sick world. He did not preach, work miracles, suffer, die and rise again so that this creation could continue in sin and death. He does not want us to persist in our merely natural existence. We still live in this world and inhabit God’s good order for creation, but make no mistake: there is no “business as usual” after Christ’s resurrection. The Paschal mystery has changed everything.

Christ is risen. Because He died and rose again in our flesh, we are right with God. In fact, God has adopted us as His beloved children through Jesus’ resurrection. In the world’s eyes we are orphans. We work, struggle and suffer like anyone else. We are often perplexed and in pain. By the standards of our time we are backward, regressive, foolish. Our brothers and sisters elsewhere in the world – Africa, Asia, the Middle East – are oppressed, mocked, beaten, even killed. The world sees this and taunts us: “Where is your God?” But Jesus proclaims to us that, through His resurrection, God has become our dear Father. What does the world’s scorn matter, if the Lord God, Creator and King of the universe, is our Father? If He is for us, then who can stand against us?

Christ is risen. He calls us His brothers, as He says to Mary Magdalene, “Go and tell my brothers.” He made us His brothers when He took our flesh as His own, when He lived and taught as a man, when He shared our sufferings and death. He has taken everything which is ours and will give us everything which is His.

Are you sinful? Do you see evil in your heart, mind, and hands? Jesus took your sins upon Himself and put them to death. He has clothed you in His righteousness. Even now He is crucifying your sin and purifying you with the fire of His Holy Spirit. The day is coming soon when He will strip your sin from you completely, like removing dirty clothes after a long and difficult day.

Are you poor? Do you struggle even to feed yourself and your family? Jesus has given you all of creation. The world and all its abundance will belong to you; when Christ's Kingdom comes fully you will eat the fruit of the tree of life and drink from eternal fountains; mountains, deserts, forests, rivers – all will be yours.

Are you lonely? Have you lost your family, do you lack friends in this life? All the saints, the whole Church in heaven and on earth, are yours. Paul, Peter, Pastor Morehouse and Pastor Palmer, me, the angels, your neighbor in the pew – all are yours. All things in heaven and on earth are yours, for you are joint-heirs with Christ your brother.

Christ is risen. By dying He destroyed death, and by rising He has restored our life. Everything we lost in Adam we have regained in Jesus – and more. Adam was in the Garden with God, but now God has become one of us, and our bodies will share in His own life. You in this congregation who are sick; you who are old; you whose bones ache, whose joints are swollen, whose vision darkens, whose bodies fail; you who are consumed with grief, depression, anxiety: rejoice! Jesus has raised your flesh from the dead and taken it to sit at the right hand of God. You will not die as unbelievers die. There will be no sting to it, for Christ has taken away the condemnation of the Law, and He has made Hell His captive. Death for you will be the doorway to life. You will rest with the Father in Heaven, joining the great hymn of praise which the angels and the saints are raising even now, and after you have rested He will raise you up incorruptible.

Christ is risen. His resurrection is salvation – not just for us men, but for all creation. God’s curse reaches the whole world, perhaps the entire cosmos, through our sin; for we were made from the dust of the ground, and we were made to keep, cultivate, and perfect the earth. In our Fall, the earth fell also: into violence, disorder, infertility, and death. Remember God’s words to Adam:

*“Cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.”¹*

But now that Christ is risen, God speaks differently about His creation. Compare His words in Genesis with His promise in our Old Testament reading:

*“On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.
And he will swallow up on this mountain
the covering that is cast over all peoples,
the veil that is spread over all nations.
He will swallow up death forever.”²*

God has fulfilled this promise in the resurrection of Jesus. In Christ, He has swallowed up death forever. In Christ, He has begun a new creation. You have tasted this new creation already, and you will taste it again later this morning, when you feast on Christ, the Bread of Life; Christ, the Wine well refined. And this is only a glimpse of what is to come. Christ is coming to restore this world to the glory of Eden, and more. This earth, whose beauty even in the midst of sin and death can already render us speechless, will be transformed. Then the Scripture will be fulfilled: “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

¹ Genesis 3:17b-18

² Isaiah 25:6-9

Christ is risen. Old things have passed away; behold, all things are new. So do not cling to the ways of this world. And do not be afraid when you see those ways persisting: war, poverty, disease, grief, envy, hatred, decay, death. These are the last gasps of a dying age. They will not last forever. In another moment they will be gone. But Christ is risen. Therefore let us cling to Him, not after the flesh, but in the Holy Spirit; not seeking from Him a natural affection or comfortable existence in this life, but hoping in His resurrection for the life to come.

To the Lord Jesus Christ, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory unto ages of ages. Amen.

Easter Sunrise,

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Isaiah 25:6-9, I Corinthians 15:1-11, John 20:1-18

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