

“A New Day Is Dawning”

Rev. David Gregory

April 4, 2021

Easter Sunday



Readings

Mark 16:1-7

from the *New Revised Standard Version*

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?”

When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”

From *The Universal Christ*

Richard Rohr

Nothing is the same forever, says modern science. Ninety-eight percent of our bodies’ atoms are replaced every year. Geologists with good evidence over millennia can prove that no landscape is permanent. Water, fog, steam, and ice are all the same thing, but at different states and temperatures. “Resurrection” is another word for change but particularly positive change—which we tend to see only in the long run. In the short run, it often just looks like death.

As members and friends of the Community Congregational Church in Tiburon, California, we would like to offer our wishes to you and to those you love, for a happy, healthy, and hopeful Easter celebration. For some, this may include an opportunity to gather safely in small groups of family or friends. Others may be in settings that are more solitary.

I cannot help but make comparisons with last Easter, when we were only beginning to understand the scope of the pandemic and how it might change our lives. If you're anything like me, your assumption was that it was a temporary challenge, and that the protective measures we were putting into place would somehow get us past it. But those measures, both voluntary and otherwise, were obviously not enough, as demonstrated in the unspeakable loss of life that we have experienced in this country and around the world. And now with the growing presence of vaccines and vaccinated people, it feels like there could be a new day dawning, and we certainly have high hopes for that. In fact, the sky is getting brighter, but the sun has yet to appear at the horizon, so we wait and watch for the actual moment of resurrection to arrive. In the meantime, we live in a world of diversity—a diversity of opinions, beliefs, and practices, touching every area of our lives politically, religiously, culturally, and spiritually.

There are varying degrees of confidence in science, for example, or in what the science means. Many people are willing and ready to step forward and receive the vaccine, while others are reluctant for any number of reasons. Unfortunately, the vaccine has created yet another potential opportunity for polarization, one more way in which we might look at one another with distrust and anger, instead of truly listening to one another and giving space to care for our own emotions and our own bodies in a way that feels congruous with who we are, where we are, and how we wish to live. This is one of the reasons that our church community continues to move slowly toward physical gatherings, and it's not for lack of desire. We would love nothing more than to see and greet one another, and to express our vision for what our church might become in a post pandemic world.

One thing we should probably all agree on is that moving forward, no area of life will remain unchanged, nor will it return to pre-pandemic norms. This includes our lives as individuals, couples, and families, and also our experience of community, including our church. Simply put, we will return as changed people to a changed church. This may feel a lot like loss, because that is exactly what it is. It is appropriate to grieve a past that has been lost, even as we find excitement in planting the seeds of something new. And what better time for this conversation than in the season of resurrection?

The story is central to who we are, not just as Christians, but as human beings. It contains a scene of some female disciples, standing courageously beside Mary the mother of Jesus, wailing and grieving the traumatic loss unfolding before their eyes. When it is over, their task begins in secret, in a time suspended silently in sabbath, waiting for the first possible moment when they can bring the proper spices for burial before it is too late to do so. With no thought for logistics, and no way to move a massive stone at the entrance of the tomb, they arrived to a reality that conformed neither to their plans nor their expectations. Their resolute grief turned first where it usually does, to panic, fear, and disbelief. Not only was the body missing, but they had no idea where it had been taken, until a young man appeared, dressed in bright light. He was the one who helped them change their plans by giving them a simple idea of what they should do next.

When our world is turned upside down, as it has been for the last year, it is important for us not to get too far ahead of ourselves. Sometimes we just need to know the very next thing to do. Perhaps we need to quiet ourselves and listen to the angel hiding before us in plain sight.

Richard Rohr, one of our deeply respected spiritual guides, has said that “resurrection” is just another word for positive change. He says it is something we do not see in the moment. We can only perceive it if we take a long view. If we try to take a single snapshot, we might swear that nothing’s happening. In the short run, he says, resurrection only looks like death.

It is common to see a budding plant in the early spring, and if you observe it momentarily it seems stalled and motionless. But if you look at that same bud with the assistance of a time-lapse camera, you see the miracle of new life rising before your very eyes. It lives and moves and opens itself in a blaze of color, a realization of something that only existed up until now in a potential form.

So it is with us. It may seem like little is happening. We may be staring at a future that exists only in potential and finding ourselves with the mounting energy of impatience and frustration. We might be saying, “This is enough! We want our lives back. We want them the way they were, and we want them now.” But as Richard Rohr reminds us, resurrection is only seen in the long view. Our plans may keep changing. There may be interruptions in the process. What we think we’re preparing for might or might not happen, and so we must learn to make ourselves a comfortable home within our uncertainties.

There are a couple of moments in a day that actually make my day, and these moments are a major reason I enjoy living in a location that provides a lot of sunshine. I love seeing the moon rise each night, and it is often visible, depending on the moon phase of course, from the hillside on which we live, and from our deck which has a southern exposure and affords us a panoramic view of the skies. I equally love the early morning, as the edge of the sun becomes suddenly visible on the horizon, injecting the day with hope and promise, giving me a meditative moment to reflect on what the day might bring.

Every day is a new resurrection. Every moment is a new beginning. Every week is a holy one. We see the same story in the planting of every seed, the hatching of every bird, the blooms of spring flowers, and in the countless times we rise from the ashes of disappointment and failure and move ever closer to a life-giving, life-affirming vision for our lives. We really are going to get there. We have prepared as best we can, and the stone has been rolled away for us. Let us then now turn our attention, our energy, and our focus to the very next thing, and in due time, we will see a resurrection far beyond what we can now imagine.

