

Easter Day, Year A
March 23, 2008

RCL
Acts 10: 34-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
Colossians 3;1-4
John 20:1-18

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Alleluia! Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia! Blessings to all of you on this Day of our Lord's resurrection. May your hearts be filled with the new life that comes to us through Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

What a week it's been! Last Sunday we hailed him as King, the Son of David, waving palms as he entered Jerusalem. And we read of his Passion and death on the cross. Our children walked with him through the church and through the last days of his life on earth.

On Wednesday we walked the Stations of the Cross here in the sanctuary, and heard the expressions of sorrow from women of the Bible, many of them without names, whose lives were changed by him.

On Thursday we went with him to the upper room, where he transformed the Passover meal into the Holy Communion of his Body and Blood which is the center of our worship. There he washed the feet of his disciples and showed them how to love and serve each other.

As he left and went out to the Garden of Gethsemane, we took the Reserved Sacrament to a garden we had made for it and then stripped everything from our altar and out of our sanctuary and extinguished the sanctuary light that represents his presence here.

On Friday we venerated a wooden cross like the one on which he died and ate the sacrament of his Body which had been set aside. But all was dark and he was not present to forgive our confession of sin, or to give us his blessing.

Last night we held an Easter Vigil after the tradition of the early church, in which they watched all night for the light of Easter to dawn. We did not stay the whole night. After sundown we lit the new fire of Easter, read Bible stories that tell of God's saving acts throughout history, then welcomed Easter with flowers and bells and lots of light and with singing.

We baptized Lucas Christopher Cook into fellowship with us here and with the Church of Christ throughout the world. And our celebration of Easter began.

I applaud the many, many people in this parish who worked behind the scenes to prepare these services – the altar guild, the ushers, the choir, the Eucharistic ministers and lectors, the acolytes, the Good Shepherd and Youth Group teachers, the Fellowship Committee for their lovely baskets for our homebound members, the Eucharistic Visitors who regularly take them the sacrament, the Worship Committee, also the parish secretary, the custodians, the organist/choirmaster.

And I am grateful that so many members of the parish took advantage of the wonderful opportunity these services afford, and attended them.

The essence of Easter, you see, is really contained in the liturgies of Holy Week, and especially Good Friday. Without the depths of grief and pain that Good Friday brings we cannot really know the heights of joy that can be found in Easter. Easter celebrates rising out of death into life. And to truly understand new life we need the experience of death.

But in this life there is no shortage of Good Friday experiences. I know that you have all lived in them. I know that you can identify a time when you have been treated unfairly or were falsely accused with no one to defend you. Have you been abandoned by someone you love, denied by someone you thought supported you? Have you been left alone, been filled with dread as you looked toward the future? Have you endured pain? Have you been moved to say at some point in your life, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” as Jesus did?

And that is the point of Easter. Jesus did. He who comes to us from God has experienced all the suffering we human beings live in.

But God did not leave his Son in the depths of despair, knowing only loss and grief. God transformed all his pain into new life and God transforms all our souls’ pain and trouble into new life, too.

We are all Mary, come to the garden deeply troubled, expecting to find her beloved Jesus’ dead body there, not knowing what to do next, even more fearful when his body is not there, expecting the worst, too troubled, in fact, to recognize him standing right there in front of her. How often is the Spirit of God that close to us and we don’t perceive it?

Then he calls us by name. And the knowledge that he cares about each of us – the powerful God who made us knows our names, cares about our lives, our suffering, our joy, and loves us. This is what changes everything.

Alleluia! Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia! Through Christ and in Christ and with Christwe, too, are risen to new life
Thanks be to God.

Soli Deo Gloria