

***Alleluia! Christ is Risen!***

Last Sunday we welcomed the triumphant, resurrected Christ with bells and flowers, glorious music, and a beautifully decorated and transformed cross. In the afternoon Sara, Sophia and I shared a festive Easter meal with friends. We left early to head up to Whidbey Island to see Sara's mom, who'd just been moved to a dementia locked unit.

When we stopped at home to grab our bags, I took my plant starts in for the night. My new neighbor, young Travis walk towards me from his grandfather's house, and told me that Trent my neighbor had just died. Arriving at Sara's parents' house to stay for the night, I felt loss; it was more than Trent's death. That house, which was always full of warmth and welcome for me felt like an empty shell. Still a lovely house with a wonderful view for sure, yet the life has gone out of it. With Fay in the dementia unit, the conclusion I'd been emotionally avoiding became inescapable: it would never again be the house where I am known and welcomed, where I belong and am loved.

Monday, we went to visit Fay, and take her to lunch. She clearly was happy to see us. We are people she still recognizes and loves and introduces with pride to others, but there's no telling how much longer that will be the case. We had a nice lunch and a few hours later brought her back to her new home. By Monday afternoon, the sound of triumphant hymns and ringing bells was no longer echoing in my ears. The weight of sickness and loss, life and sadness overwhelmed it.

If resurrection is just another story with a happy ending, in the face of life –with the brutality of loss, regret, sickness, betrayal and death –

Christ, risen from the dead can become hard to believe, like a fairy tale, which we are bound to discover is in fact a tale. When we grow up to discover that happy endings do not in fact always find their way into the stories of our lives, Jesus' resurrection can seem like using a Band-Aid to cover a wound that needs 10 stitches. The wound remains.

Mary Magdalene, the rest of the women, Peter and the rest of the disciples cannot believe that Jesus is alive. They've seen too much. It's not that they don't want to believe Jesus is alive; they do. But the brutal dose of reality they'd witnessed during Jesus' last three days can't simply be set aside so easily; they witnessed Jesus' suffering and death. They felt the life leave Him and their dreams on that cross. Their joy had become deep loss and sorrow. That is not so easily overcome by someone not quite recognizable claiming to be the Lord risen from the dead. Jesus' resurrection does not rewind the story to before Jesus Passion.

The sight of the nail holes and the gaping sword gash make the difference, breaking through their numbness so that hope and trust and belief can take root. The marks on Jesus' hands and feet and side after the resurrection acknowledge their experience as real – His suffering, His crucifixion, their denial and abandonment – all real; and their loss and pain and disillusionment all genuine. *Real and genuine, yes, just not the last word.*

The wounds testify that the Father never abandoned Jesus. He suffered because He was human, truly human, and that's just what it means to live in a sinful broken world with sinful broken people. Suffering, loss, pain, death – they happen; more than that they are realities of human life. But God's love lives triumphantly over them.

God's love for His children outlasts the suffering, and invites us into new life with God.

Jesus' resurrection does not remove suffering from our lives, but rather informs our inevitable suffering, teaching us that (1) the Father loves us regardless of what we may must endure, (2) that God holds us in the suffering, (3) that suffering cannot and will not separate us from a love that refuses to let us go, and (4) God will triumph over all these painful realities and give us new life at the other end.

Suffering is transformed from that which we avoid, to a place where God is with us. Therefore, we can meet others in their time of suffering and fully expect that the Lord will be present there with and for us and others.

Christ's response to Thomas, *"Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."* Is more than Jesus proving that He is in fact the same Jesus who suffered and died. Jesus tells Thomas and all disciples who come after him: *"You need not be afraid of these wounds; nor make you doubts what God has done and through this suffering. In your own suffering God does not withdraw, but draws near."*

But Jesus' words say something more as well. We need not fear the suffering of others because Christ has already conquered the source of that suffering. In fact, we can confidently draw near to those who suffer expecting that entering into another's person's pain we will discover that Christ is present with them and us.

So, *“Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side.”*

Here we will meet the Risen Christ, and discover the power of resurrection life to overcome all things.

Perhaps that’s why Jesus tells us:

*“Do not doubt but believe.”* and *“blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”*

***Alleluia! Christ is Risen!***