

Alleluia! The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed, alleluia!

Happy Easter! and Happy Earth Day! Tomorrow is the 49<sup>th</sup> celebration of Earth Day and today is approximately the one thousand, nine hundred and ninetieth celebration of the resurrection. It's unusual for Easter and Earth Day to coincide since Earth Day is always remembered on April 22, but the date of Easter changes depending on the first full moon after the Equinox. Easter is deeply connected with the rhythms of the year, and in fact its name, Easter, comes from pre-Christian festival of the equinox which centered on the goddess of fertility. That's where Easter eggs and Easter bunnies come from.

For those of us on the northern hemisphere, the coming of the spring is always going to be the greatest symbol of the resurrection. The new life after the winter. Even here, where our winters are mild, there is a wonderful sense of things stirring, and especially this year, the wild flowers. I hope you have managed to get out to see them. These photos were taken by Linda Turney, one of our members.

When I was a child, on Good Friday, after the long three hour service, we went into the woods and picked primroses and wood anemones which were used to decorate a resurrection garden. It had three crosses on a hill, a tomb and figures of Jesus and Mary Magdalene – like a Christmas crèche but with an Easter theme. Decorated with moss and primroses.

For John's gospel tells us it was in a garden that Mary Magdalene met the resurrected Jesus, thinking at first that he was the gardener. It was an easy mistake to make since she had seen Jesus die and knew without a doubt that he was dead. But, astonishingly, he was alive!

Alleluia! The Lord is Risen! **He is risen indeed, alleluia!**

For John's early readers, that garden probably reminded them of a garden they had heard about since they were toddlers. The Garden of Eden.

The ancient peoples gave us the story of the wonderful garden to explain the development of the world. They were not scientists. They did not know that the cosmos is still in the process of creation or that the Earth is just one small planet in an ever-expanding universe. Their stories answer different questions. And the big one was "Why are we separated from God?" "Why are we restlessly searching for God?"

In that first garden were two trees, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As you know, the first people ate fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and thus they had free will, the power to choose, and of course they did not choose well. Violence and sin entered the world and humanity experienced separation from God.

But in this second garden, the garden of the resurrection, the garden where Mary had that incredible experience of meeting her beloved alive and well yet somehow changed, in this second garden it was not just Jesus who had changed - everything had changed. The world was quite different.

Because in his death and resurrection, Jesus brought reconciliation with God, freely available to everyone. Once again, like Adam and Eve we are able to walk with God - not just a few special people like Abraham or Moses, but everyone. Humanity no longer needs to experience the restlessness and death of separation. We have new life in Christ. Jesus himself is the tree of life. Alleluia!

Jesus himself is the tree of life. The risen Christ who brings a new and different way. The life of the crucified and resurrected. The life of peace

and justice. The life of hope. Jesus is not just a man who taught and did amazing things 2000 years ago in Israel and Palestine. I doubt that we would have bothered to come together this morning if that is all he is. Jesus is the Christ. Jesus the Christ is from before the beginning of time, he was there at the birth of the universe and by his incarnation he has become one with the universe.

So Earth Day is a celebration of the Christ embodied in Creation. There is no separation between the Christ and planet Earth, or between Christ and the cosmos. In fact, there is no separation. We are not separate from God and we are not separate from each other and we are not separate from our environment. We are not separate. Period. We are part of Creation and we are part of God. God is in the cypress tree and God is in you and in me. We do not worship the cypress tree because it is not God, any more than you or I are God. We worship the God who is in the tree and who is beyond the tree, the Creator-Christ who is both beyond and within every part of creation.

Today we face a grave crisis unlike one humanity has ever known before. In our greed we have taken more from the Earth than she can sustain. We have changed and continue to change the atmosphere and with that everything else is changing. It is like the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Our choices have proved not to be wise ones. The bounty and grace of the planet is being exhausted faster than we have imagined possible.

Yet the problems created by humanity's decisions back in that first garden have been resolved, overcome, transformed, in the amazing resurrection of Jesus. as Paul said in the reading we heard from Corinthians, " For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. " The forces of the sin

matrix have been overwhelmed by Jesus' refusal to meet violence with violence, and they have been seen to be powerless over God's people. Alleluia! For the Lord is Risen! **He is risen indeed, alleluia!**

Jesus Christ is the tree of life. So let us not lose hope as we learn more about the changing planet. Let us not lose hope for resurrection is not only possible, resurrection happens. Our faith tells us that even in the most difficult of circumstances, there is always the promise of spring, there is always the grass pushing up through the pavement, there is always new possibility. The time between the last supper, and Easter morning in the garden of resurrection was long and heavy. The disciples did not know it was Easter. They thought that everything was lost.

The time between realizing our plight, and the resurrection of humanity and the planet may also be long and heavy but we are the generation that has the opportunity to make it shorter. We, the disciples of Jesus, are the people of the resurrection, we are the ones who can make a difference today. It is not too late. It is never too late for resurrection.

For Alleluia! Christ is Risen! **He is risen indeed, alleluia!**

And if Christ is risen, then the Earth too will rise again.

Perhaps that resurrection is already happening. Perhaps even this morning the new blades of grass are pushing up through humanity's ignorance and destructive behavior.

We don't know what happened for Jesus after being laid in the tomb, dead, and walking out again early on Easter morning, fully alive. We don't know what the process of resurrection looks like, but maybe it has already started. There are signs of hope. There are people of good will all over the planet working for change and new awareness.

We have a choice. Will we continue in the old ways and wring our hands like Pilate, saying there is really nothing he can do in the face of the crowd? Will we stand at a distance and watch what is happening with pain and fear? Or will we start now to build the next resurrection garden?

I believe that every time we work for peace and justice through our prayers, our habits and our giving, and every time we remember that there is no separation, we are building the resurrection garden. And when we do that, the Holy Spirit will support and multiply our work, and who knows what the new garden will look like?

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