

## Sermon- The First Sunday after Easter

In our everyday world that we live in, Easter is a day often associated with the coming of Spring. There are Easter baskets and new Easter outfits and Easter egg hunts on the lawn. There are peeps and jellybeans and Cadbury chocolates. Schools and universities close for what was once called Easter break but is now called simply spring break.

Now most of us are aware that Easter is one of those religious holidays and so some of us even go to church on Easter Sunday. In fact, some folks pretty much go to church ONLY on Easter Sunday. We sing special songs. We proclaim special truths- hallelujah, Christ is risen. But although it is indeed a special day, it is still only one day.

It is somewhat ironic, don't you think, that many of us spend the six weeks of the season of Lent preparing ourselves through prayer and contemplation for the celebration of Easter. We may even give something up, let go of something, to help us to focus, to be less distracted, as we ready ourselves for the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Yet then when Easter Sunday finally arrives, it takes us only a day to pretty much get over it. But in the Christian calendar, Easter is really not just one day at all. Like Lent, it is a season too made up of 50 days with 7 Sundays.

Lent ends on that awful Saturday, that day after the crucifixion when death is all there is. That bitter Saturday when Jesus and all hope are dead. That breathless Saturday when, as Paul tells us, we are invited to die with Jesus too.

And then Easter begins on that blessed resurrection Sunday followed by a time, a whole season really, in which we might, if we dare, experience our own resurrection as well.

In the Gospel lesson from John we hear of that first Easter Sunday. At the beginning of that same chapter (just before the selection we read this morning) we hear of the first witnesses to the empty tomb. We are told that it was "Early on that first morning of the week, while it was still dark" that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb.

John has many references to light vs darkness in his gospel. In fact, he begins his gospel in Chapter 1 by referring to Jesus as the "light that shines in the darkness". And it is in the darkness of that first Easter morning when Mary and then Peter and another disciple find the tomb empty.

But they still do not understand and we are told that the disciples then went back to "where they were staying". I find that an interesting turn of phrase. "Where they were staying". They were hunkered down. They were staying put just where and who they were. They weren't going anywhere!

Of course who could blame them really. This thing had not turned out the way they had thought it would. They had thought (hoped at least) that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah. But the Messiah was supposed to win, to conquer. And Jesus had not won. He had not changed anything.

He had been executed, killed just like all the other so called Messiahs before him. The Romans knew all too well how to handle annoyances like Jesus, and they knew how to handle his followers too, of course.

And as the story goes on, John tells us that on the evening of that same day, (evening, again a time of darkness) that the disciples had locked themselves in that room, that room where they were staying, afraid of what might happen next. They had closed the windows and barred the door.

Sure, they had heard that the tomb was empty, a couple of them had actually seen it and Mary had this story of talking with Jesus and how he was still somehow alive. But empty tombs and one woman's crazy story were not enough to change the facts. Jesus had been crucified, they had all seen that. He was nailed up on a cross. No one ever comes down from there alive.

But Jesus came to them on that dark evening, appeared among them and showed them his hands and his side. Jesus spoke to them, breathed on them and bestowed the Holy Spirit upon them and they were overjoyed, we are told, when they saw the Lord.

And yet, and yet as the story continues, we find that a full week later, on that next Sunday, that first "first Sunday after Easter" the disciples were still locked up in that same room where they were "staying", with the windows still closed and the door still barred.

To all appearances it seemed that in spite of their own personal experience of the risen Jesus nothing much had really changed. They were still afraid, still unsure about what to do with this new reality. They were still locked in behind closed doors. They were still in the dark.

But it turns out, their fear was misdirected. It was not the authorities that came after them, it was Jesus. And closed windows and locked doors would not deter him from coming.

Jesus came to them, a second time, showed them again his hands and side, invited Thomas to touch and feel where he had been wounded and he challenged them all to stop doubting and to believe.

And this time they must have believed, at least a little, for it is only a few verses later in the story when Peter makes one of the simplest yet bravest statements ever spoken. "I'm going out", he said, "fishing".

And the others followed suit and said that they would go with him and they did. And it was while they were out----fishing that Jesus came to them yet a third time and this time he welcomed them to the light of a warm fire and he fed them and he told them if they loved him they would do the same, that they would welcome and feed his sheep, for that was what it would mean to accept his invitation to follow him.

And we know that they did and the world has never been the same and it is because they did that we are all sitting here this morning in this place with that empty cross hanging up there and it is why we can still sing together Christ the Lord is risen --today.

But I find myself wondering this morning, on this first Sunday after Easter, if perhaps I too am still hiding in the dark behind closed doors, still afraid of what resurrection might mean in my own life and what it might call me to do if I really took it seriously, for we know all too well that Jesus has a history of turning over the furniture and chasing people out into the streets.

Yes I find myself wondering this Sunday morning if I, (perhaps we?) might be all too prone to seek a nice place to stay rather than a tough place to fish. And I wonder even if I (perhaps we) would, truth be told, just as soon Jesus go back into that tomb and quit coming through our closed doors and walking across our nice carpet with his muddy feet because we have worked really hard you know to get our place just the way we like it.

But maybe that is why Easter needs to be a season for us and not just a day. Even with the disciples who were right there it took a while. It was a process. Jesus appeared to them at least three times. The first time they saw, the second time they believed, it took a third time for them to followed the risen Lord.

And perhaps that is what Easter might be for us. We begin by seeing and then by believing until we finally be living the resurrected life. For that is really what Easter is about isn't it?

It is not just about going to heaven when we die though that is our assurance. But Easter is about, as Paul says, dying and being raised, resurrected right now with Christ. That's why we are called Easter people.

Last Sunday, the first Sunday of Easter, we focused on the resurrection of Jesus. That bold proclamation that death and the powers that be do not win, that life and a living Christ have the last word. As Anne Lamott says, "Grace always bats last".

It takes the next six weeks or maybe a whole lifetime really, to figure out what that truly means and if it makes any real difference in our lives and if it does then what difference it really makes.

And it does take a lifetime for resurrection, for it is not a one time event. It is a way of life and anytime we think we have found a place we can stay we have lost that way.

As again Paul tells us “we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image”. Not were transformed, not are transformed, not will be transformed. But we are being transformed and are always being except of course when we have pulled off the road looking for a nice place to stay.

In the original Greek language of the New Testament the word that is translated as transformation is metamorphosis. Metamorphosis, as you might know, is also a biological term. The biological definition of metamorphosis is “a profound change in form from one stage to the next in the life history of an organism as from the caterpillar to the pupa and from the pupa to the adult butterfly”.

A “profound change in form from one stage to the next”. If Easter is about anything my friends, it is most certainly about that. A profound change from one stage in our life to the next. And lest some of us get our hopes up, all we need do is read the Old Testament to know that no matter how old we are God is never quite through with us.

Now i am not saying this is true but I invite you to imagine this with me. What if. What if the caterpillar could feel that he is somehow changing, that he is becoming something different, though he cannot see yet what it might be.

What if he could sense that this change might somehow involve loosing some of his ability to grip and to hang on with his many strong legs and feet to this firm limb where he now stands.

Might not he try to double down and try to find safety and comfort and stability where he is. Might he try to protect himself, to resist, to hold off this changing, by building a protective wall around himself, a strong cocoon to keep the danger outside.

And though it may seem to be working at first might he also find over time that the change is happening anyway, from within, and he is beginning to outgrow this place, this little room. He has grown something new, though he does not yet understand what it is but it has made it more uncomfortable in here than it might be out there. And perhaps he already senses that he is no longer in such need of this place anyway.

And what if it is only when he bravely decides to break through this little world he has made for himself that he finds that he has grown wings and they are beautiful and strong, and amazing. And although it is true that he can no longer cling to the things of

this world like he used to, he has wings now and they can take him to places and to heights he could never have imagined before.

Happy Easter my friends. For every Sunday, and every day is Easter for Easter people like us.