

Sermon – Easter Sunday – Acts 10:34-43, Colossians 3:1-4, Matthew 28:1-10

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Each week I print out colouring sheets on the subject of the day to put at the back of the church for the children.

This week, I had a hard time.

The site I usually use somehow had got stuck on Palm Sunday and when I googled ‘colouring sheet’ and ‘Easter’ all that came up was pages and pages of Easter eggs and Easter bunnies.

The most important and powerful day in our Christian heritage and all we have been reduced to is the fantasy of children.

Even amidst the sound of sleigh bells and Santas at Christmas, one occasionally sees a nativity scene.

Why is it that the critical meaning behind this day is so forgotten?

Why are we so afraid to say outside the confines of our church community those glorious words of Jesus’ victory over death – **Alleluia! Christ is risen?**

Oh! **You** may say, **you don’t understand!**

With your collar on, people out there **expect** you to say these things – crazy though they may be.

However, until recently, **I** was also out there and **I** was afraid to pronounce this basis of our faith – afraid that I would be seen as a religious nut.

If I were to be honest, the fear for **me** was because I struggled with, and still do, the whole resurrection thing!

I worked in a **scientific** world and I needed **empirical** answers.

Being in the **medical** world also where the sight of death is common, someone **coming back** from the dead – you’ve got to be kidding.

How can one proclaim something like the resurrection in such a world without proof?

The answer is through **experiencing the living presence of God.**

To get past the **fear**, one needs the **experience.**

It is easier to **talk** of our faith **without** the solid proof if we can speak out of our **experience** – our journey with God – the times when a living Jesus is very much present to us – the times when, through the presence of the Spirit, we somehow just **knew** that we were not alone – that his promise to go before us and be always present where we are dispelled all our fears.

Why should anyone be frightened by the resurrection?

The gospel today, though, is full of fear and fear overcome.

Consider the reaction of the first people who knew about it.

In Matthew’s version of the Easter story, fear is prevalent.

In that early morning hour, both the soldiers and the women at the tomb were **seized** by fear.

First an earthquake, then an electrically dazzling angel . . . Who wouldn’t be scared?

Wouldn’t you not be terrified if you felt you were caught in an earthquake – if you felt the solid earth beneath your feet move?

However, fear, and how it is overcome, varies from person to person.

First there are the guards.

When **they** felt the earthquake, *‘they shook and became like dead men.’*

Now that is some fear!

They had thought they had control of the situation.

They had sealed the tomb and guarded it all night – all for nothing because the stone – seemingly all on its own, rolled away to expose the inner chamber.

Furthermore, there did not appear to be a **body** inside.

How were they going to explain this to their commander?

If they try to tell the truth, they would probably be the next ones to die on a cross!

Their paralysis was so profound that they did not see the angel or hear the words, ***'Do not be afraid.'***

In their minds they were already planning what they should do.

Now, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary experienced their share of fear, too.

And, yet, **the joy** they had experienced **in the presence of Jesus**, the flame of hope he had ignited in their hearts still burned within them.

In **spite** of their fear, they wanted to believe Jesus' promise that God would raise him up.

The faith of these two women was **strong enough** to edge out their fear, and so **they** were able to hear the angel's message:

"He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him."

So they left the tomb, **with fear, yes**, but also great **joy**, and ran to tell the other disciples.

Suddenly, **Jesus himself** appeared to them and confirmed the angel's message.

"Come meet me in Galilee!"

In the very moment when their joy transcended their fear, they discovered that the risen Christ was with them and they knew that he would never leave them again.

Wherever **they** were, **he** would be there with them.

The belief in the resurrection, as in the virgin birth, is faced with innumerable intellectual and theological problems.

Many honest people, like us, find it very difficult to accept the idea of resurrection from the dead.

Even though Jesus had told his disciples that he would rise again after the crucifixion, **they** could not understand it.

They never really expected Jesus to rise again.

After the crucifixion they were bewildered and perplexed.

They were full of doubts and disbelief.

But the situation soon changed.

Their encounter with the risen Lord changed everything..

The disciples who disbelieved, the disciples who betrayed, and those who deserted him at the time of crisis, were now forgiven by the risen Lord.

They were given a new hope, and a new mission.

As a woman, I find it fascinating that Jesus chose **women** to reveal himself to first and then, very much counterculturally, gave them the task of telling the others.

In the first century, women were not even allowed to testify in court.

They were not considered reliable witnesses.

By contrast, the **guards'** report that the disciples had **stolen** the body would have commanded much greater respect then, and probably would in our scientific world today.

In fact, in view of the prejudice against women's testimony in Jesus' time, **no one** would **have invented** the testimony of the women and yet it is in all four Gospels;

Yes, **the women** had every reason to be afraid – **who would believe them!**

However, they had been there with Jesus through his ministry – they had walked with him – they had heard him say, several times, that he would rise again and they believed him.

The women stayed beside him through his journey to the cross – even when the disciples had deserted him.

Despite their fear, they were able to hear the angel – hear the wonderful announcement that Jesus had done what he had promised because they just knew he would.

They were also shown the **empirical** proof of his resurrection.

They actually **saw** the stone roll away – at the angel's invitation, they had looked into the grave and seen it already empty.

And they were given the privilege of being the first to encounter the risen Lord.

Resurrection faith does not arise, though, out of **empirical** evidence, of which the chief priests and soldiers had plenty, but out of an experienced presence of the risen Christ and by his continuing presence among us.

Through our journey with Christ in our lives – through our experience of his presence, we **can** get beyond our fear and have the courage to proclaim a radical resurrection faith in the present, not just as a historical event.

Then we can be confident enough to say **Alleluia! Christ is risen!**

Maybe then, when we search the internet for colouring sheets depicting Easter – this glorious centre of our faith – we would come up with an image of the open tomb and see the joy in the faces of the women and not just Easter eggs and Easter bunnies.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia! Amen