



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

The Passover of Resurrection_ - Easter Sunday- 4_17_2022

I speak to you today as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen.

As I was preparing for today's sermon and going through all the many different layers that we all have to live with as we are living in unprecedented times, I found myself focused on the fact that Easter and Passover are overlapping this year for the first time in 33 years. And this caused me to think a little bit about this shared connection that we have between Christians and Jews in the Passover, which is the celebration of that moment in the book of Exodus, where the people of God were being oppressed. And when the Israelites cried out to God, God acted in history and rescued them from oppression by the Pharaoh, by sending among many other plagues, an angel of death who flew over the houses of the Israelites and spared them because they had followed Moses's command to sacrifice a lamb and put the blood of the lamb on the lintel. And so death passed over the people of Israel and they made their way to the Promised Land eventually.

And that Passover is remembered in Judaism through a family celebration in which the youngest child asked the question, how is this night different from any other night? And contained in that question is a kind of prompt to four other questions that are asked in rapid succession to create the ritual of Passover, which then in turn is used as a kind of invitation to speak about this narrative of redemption of Israel by God.

And standing inside that question are a couple of beliefs about Jewish identity and time. The Jews see themselves as the inheritors of Israel. They are the Israelites today. They have experienced their own oppression and have emerged. And in terms of time, there is a moment in which it says, how is this night different from other nights? And that is to signify the fact that in Judaism, the day and the night turn at dusk, it's at dusk that a new day begins. And it's at dusk that an old day ends. And this conveys a kind of theological point that the whole point of time within Judaism is that dusk is a time of expectation. The days live in terms of expectation. And that expectation is focused on the Messiah who will someday come and rescue Israel. And by rescuing Israel will rescue the world.

Christianity does not ask a question. As much as we share this heritage in the Passover, we do not ask a question when we celebrate Easter. It is the case, however, that we do kind of draw from even the word "Passover" to describe what happens to Jesus through His death and resurrection, since it did happen around the time of the Passover. In English, we use the term Easter, and this is something that happened in the seventh or eighth century when Christian missionaries got to a part of England and they heard about this great Goddess named Eostre who came in the spring. And they told the inhabitants of the adherence of that religion, hey, good news! Eostre likes Jesus and so we're going to call it Easter from now on. And that's when Jesus comes.

And for reasons that remain mysterious, the people of England bought it. But in much of the rest of the world, when Christians speak about Easter, they use the word Passover or a derivative of it. So in Spanish, Easter is described as the Pascua de Resurrección, the Passover of Resurrection. And in Italian, it is Pasqua, just simply Pasqua. And then the day after Easter in Italian is called Pasquetta, which means little Easter. And that's meant to convey the moment you take a day off and you eat all of the food that was leftover from Easter. And if it's Italian cooking, you know it's better the next day. Unlike other cuisines.

But Christianity does not begin with a question. Christianity celebrates its Passover of resurrection with an acclamation. And that is that Christ is risen, hallelujah! And the way in which Christians organize their time is that the day begins at dawn, not at dusk because the time that we are living in is not that of anticipation. The time that we are living in as Christians is fulfillment. And this means that the things that Jesus contended with in His life and through His death, the things that assaulted Him and that He took on because they assault the whole world, the power of sin and death and the devil and evil. These things through Christ have been fundamentally destroyed and broken.

Evil may still have its day. The devil might roam around like a lion because the time is so short. We may still experience sin inside and outside. We may still struggle with all the things that oppose God, but these things in fact have been broken. They have no dominion over you. They cannot claim you. It does not matter how much they seem to loom large in your life, Christ looms larger.

And so when Christians say hallelujah, Christ is risen, it is the acclamation of that victory over sin and death and evil, and the devil. And the day begins with the dawn because that is the new day. And the challenge you and I face is to see that new day as today. Today is that new day of resurrection for us. Today is the time in which we remember our identity. This is the day in which we understand the time that we are truly living in. Not a time of anxiety, not a time of fear, not a time of trouble, but ultimately a time of freedom, a time of love and a time of liberation.

There are three things I want you to see today in our reading from the Gospel of Luke, because they are key and they convey points that you have to pull into your hearts and hold onto, as you go through this time of resurrection, as you begin this new day. And the first is that the resurrection is God's work, not ours. The challenge that we see in the gospels is there was no reason to believe in the resurrection. The disciples had fled or betrayed Him. There was no one around Him. The women who are brave enough to go to the tomb, to anoint the body expected to find Him dead. And yet, Christ was risen from the dead. And the resurrection always comes to us in the same way. Not as our work, not as our effort, not as something that we can flex like a muscle, but as something that is always already in our midst, if we have eyes to see.

And so the challenge we have when it comes to resurrection, the first challenge I want to lift up before you today is the challenge of faith. And faith is not a great work. Faith does not come from obeying some god's command. Faith is the willingness to let God be present in your life. You see an image of this with anybody who goes to 12-Step meetings and they make a deliberate decision to turn their life and their will over to God, as they understand God to be. And they experience in that act of faith, that permission for God to be present, the beginning of their healing.

The second thing I want you to see today is that the resurrection always creates community. In today's gospel the minute that the women come to the tomb, they find two men dressed in dazzling clothes, which are meant to be angels delivering a message. And they immediately run back and tell others, and they start to create the Christian community. And that Christian community always accompanies the resurrection. We know Jesus has risen primarily through the blessing we have of Christian community. And though the last two-and-a-half years have been a challenge, it's been possible to see Christian community again and again, reassert itself, despite the challenges we've experienced.

It's been amazing for me as your pastor to see the bravery that you have come and shown when you all come together and serve others. And so the family of 14 that we recently settled in the area of Afghan refugees, the minute we brought them into their home, 40 volunteers came forward and helped clean the home and make things right for them and to provide them with the love and support they needed. And that was the Christian community of action - our Christian community in action.

And communities like ours, we heal by congregating, which is why this past pandemic has been such a challenge to us. We heal by congregating. We get to be around each other, even though sometimes we don't have a whole lot in common and sometimes we even irritate each other, but that connection we have with one another is powerful and it gives us strength. And religion cannot

be practiced alone, even though if you are on a desert island, you can have faith but you cannot have the kind of community we have in Christ.

And so the second thing that the resurrection does for us in creating community is it gives us hope. That hope sustains us. That hope carries us. Hope is like oxygen to the Christian body. It helps us move and keep going when things get tough. It helps us to believe when things get difficult. It helps us to love in ways we never thought we could love. So hope is key and hope is a gift of the resurrection.

And the final thing that's important for us to know is that the resurrection includes everybody. The interesting thing about the Passover in Exodus is it was a good day for the Israelites. It was a bad day for the Egyptians and the Pharaoh. In Christ's resurrection, everybody is redeemed. Everybody will meet Christ. Enemies will fall to their knees and embrace one another and weep, for Christ has died for all. This is what we read today in our reading from Saint Paul to the Corinthians, "For as all die in Adam," by which he means *all* humanity, "So all will be made alive in Christ," by which he means all humanity. Christ, the second Adam will give birth to a new community, a new humanity through His resurrection.

And Christ was not the angel of death who flew over the Israelites. Christ was the lamb that they sacrificed and the blood that was put on the lintel that saved them was the same blood that Jesus shed on the cross. And that blood was sufficient to cleanse all and includes all and loves all and has us all together in Christ, forgiven, and redeemed and transformed by His resurrection.

And so the last thing that I want you to hold on to is love because that love that Christ has given us is able to embrace all, even when our love that we have that is our own making. Even when that hits a stumbling block, even when we cannot conceive of what it might be to love an enemy, someone who is trying to kill us, Christ has given us the victory of His love, which embraces all. And if you cannot love someone today, trust in Christ that His love will allow you to love them tomorrow because the resurrection is about a new day, which is another way of saying that the resurrection is about the future.

So these three things, faith, hope, and love, you find them written about in the scriptures and the Christian tradition has a very deliberate belief about these. The Christian tradition teaches us that these are the things God gives us. We cannot give ourselves faith. We cannot give ourselves hope. We cannot give ourselves love. Only Christ can give us the faith we need. Only Christ can give us the hope which helps us to carry on. Only Christ can give us the love that knows no boundaries and sees in each person the face of Christ looking back at them.

So today on this Easter day, I pray that the resurrection comes to you. Open your arms of faith to it. I pray that the community that the resurrection has created is

real for you today, that it feels as solid as this pulpit. And I pray that the love of Christ reign in your heart so that you would know that you are saved as well.

Amen.