

Sermon for Easter Day 2011

The various traditions about the resurrection of Jesus usually become telescoped into one wonderful story that extends from the early morning visit of Mary Magdalene to the tomb to the appearances of Jesus on the road to Emmaus, in Galilee, and Jerusalem.

The endings of the four Gospels contribute the parts of the story and represent the various traditions of the time about the resurrection and the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. In all of that, what is clear is that no one saw Jesus come out of the tomb. The narratives present apocalyptic elements such as a great earthquake, and an interpreting angel coming from heaven to roll away the stone and affirm that Jesus was truly raised from the dead. However, what starkly confronted the women and the disciples was the empty tomb. Initially the women believed that the body had been taken away, and the disciples did not believe the report of the women who went to the tomb first. John's Gospel has Peter and John follow up on the women's report, but John says that as yet they did not understand the scripture that Jesus must be raised from the dead.

Mary reports that when she first sees Jesus, she doesn't recognize him. The gospels have different ways of getting it across, as Sarah Dylan writes: *...there's something different about Jesus after God has raised him from the dead. He does things he didn't do before, like appear in locked rooms. But he also does things that he did before like eat and drink with his disciples. While they know him as the same person, there's something different about his appearance; his friends don't realize immediately who he is when they see him. Something has changed, something that's hard to pinpoint, but that's so profound that at times even Jesus' friends don't recognize him.*

New life, resurrection life, is like that. When we receive it, for the first time or on a deeper level, things change.

***“Relationships change.** Jesus addresses those who were his followers as sisters and brothers. As we live into the new life Jesus brings, we find ourselves receiving those who*

were friends, or even sometimes if we change enough, our enemies as our sisters and brothers.

“Our understanding of power changes. *The risen Christ hasn't become the fearful agent of vengeance that some wanted him to be before his death, and some still want him to be now. The one who came among them as a servant still works among them by serving: the risen Christ cooks breakfast for his friends. Indeed, his friends seem to recognize him because he does what he has always done, calling them by name, breaking bread, breathing peace. When we recognize Christ's new life, we also recognize God's power. We finally understand that Jesus' unconditionally welcoming everyone to feast with him wasn't a way to pass the time until God came with power to set things right: it was the way God's power is revealed and the world's redemption takes place.*

Our vision changes. *When we take in the new life Christ offers, we can see Christ's presence everywhere -- in Creation and the creativity that is God's gift, in the eyes of a child, in the heart of an enemy. In injustices and wounds, we see opportunities to participate in the risen Christ's healing and redemption of the world.*

Our heart changes. *The more we take in Christ's new life, the more we experience Christ's compassion. We learn to see others as people God loves and has given gifts we need to be the Body of Christ in the world. And as we learn to love those whom we saw as unlovable, we experience the unreserved graciousness with which Christ loves us.*

Our sense of what's possible changes. *In Egypt, the freed slaves saw armies advancing and saw no way out; prophets like Moses and Miriam saw a way forward by plunging into the waters. What seemed to be certain death became a call to new life, as the scattered Hebrew slaves became a people, God's people. In Judea, some looked at Jesus' cross and saw death; some looked at the empty tomb and anticipated death for themselves, as Roman law decreed death to grave robbers. But what looks like death is an opening for new life.*

After the Resurrection, Jesus calls his disciples his "brothers." They betrayed him and deserted him at the time of his trial and death. But now he restores them as his apostles,

bearers of the Good News, and trusts them once again to represent him. And so it is with us. We are like the disciples. We are flawed persons and have failed him often as individuals and as a church. But Jesus continues to call us to follow him into the world and to share the Good News with others.

And what, exactly, is the message of resurrection and new life? The implications of this basic message are radical and comprehensive. Anticipation displaces dread. Regret gives way to equanimity. Cynicism vanishes before joy. A power greater than ourselves enables us to conquer addiction. Purpose usurps futility. Reconciliation overtakes estrangement. Inner peace calms disquiet and distraction. Creativity banishes boredom. Death gives way to life, darkness to light, fear to confidence, anxiety to peace, and despair to hope. Only then can the fulfillment of our deepest desires, our wildest dreams, and our fondest hopes, originate from the heart of God rather than from the human heart curved in on itself.

It might be hard to recognize at first, but new life has come among us, and we are invited to become more truly who we are in Christ, more truly ourselves, more fully the presence of the risen Christ in the world. That is the strange and wonderful news that Mary Magdalene, apostle to the apostles, gives to us now. And when we take that news in, we, like Mary's first hearers, will find ourselves sent forth to be known and make Jesus known to our brothers and sisters in a community for others through nourished in the breaking of the bread, sent to bring healing of the sick, love to the unlovable, and the reconciliation of each of us to one another and to God in Christ. New life has come among us! Alleluia!