

Remembering Forward: A sermon for Easter 2010
From the Bible: Matthew 28: 1-10

So, here we are once again.

Easter Sunday morning.

With Spring in the air and surrounded as we are by glorious music and an abundance of flowers. And, one more time face to face with the Gospel and its incredible affirmation that Christ is risen which dares to claim and dares us to believe that the end of the story (even the end of our story) is not death, as we would expect, but Life.

And whether you approach all this...

- As incredible miracle;
- Or, as absolutely impossible;
- Or, find yourself somewhere in between...stumbling your way towards faith...sometimes wondering how to believe or what to believe.

Here we are...left to take stock of the story;

And of the claim of resurrection which stands at the very center of the Christian faith.

So, as you consider the Gospel with its unbelievable message;

Consider also your own life and what it might mean for you if the witness of the Bible is true.

So, beginning with the Gospel...

If we were not so used to the story, the imagery Matthew uses to recount what happened on that Sunday long ago might actually catch us off guard.

- An earthquake that shakes not only the ground, but also shakes up lives;
- Angels that look more like the wizard Gandalf, from JRR Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings than the Renaissance cherubim that we have come to expect when we think of angels;
- Strong armed guards keeling over and becoming like dead men and Jesus who was dead experienced as "alive" again.

Expectations turned upside down.

Life turned right side up.

Resurrection.

But take note...resurrection is not resuscitation.

Not some sort of cosmic CPR...even CPR preformed by God.

Resurrection, as the gospels describe it, is something else.

Something more.

- Even though they had laid his thorn scarred body in a stone cold tomb, Jesus was somehow *real* to them again. Real enough to transform their lives.
- Even though they had watch him die, Jesus was somehow *present* to them again meeting them just where they were whether they were hiding in rooms so they would not be found or leaving town on the run so they would not be seen.

And, I would argue, the story is not only, and maybe not even primarily, about what happened to Jesus. But, instead, about what happened to those grief stricken women who first stumbled their way to the tomb in the early morning light. And then, from them to the scared to death disciples hiding somewhere hoping not to be found.

And then from them to others...somehow leading to you and me;

Threading its way down through the years from then to now.

The story of resurrection is not just about what happens to Jesus...

But about what happens next.

And what happens now.

And where we go if we want to meet Jesus.

And what does all this mean for you and me;
Living as we do between the promise of the day and the headlines in the news?
Maybe this...

The Easter story is first about *presence*.
The experienced *presence* of Jesus even after they had watched him die.
Similar to, but more than this...

Years ago, a couple of weeks after his wife had died, a friend stopped by my office to talk. He had walked into his home the night before, he said. And, like he had done for all those years before she died, he began to her what had happened that day. For fifteen minutes he talked to her. He said. Before, that is, he remembered she was no longer there. But, for those 15 minutes she was there – in that place...present to him.

Resurrection, I think, is something like that...for those who loved Jesus and love him still.
Jesus real again.
Present again.
So much so that we can hear his voice and sense his presence.
So much so that it can change lives transforming despair to hope and fear to faith.
Just as it changed mine...and maybe yours as well.

And the Easter story is about *power*.
And, about our deciding who has the power and whose story provides the framework that shapes our values and how we live.
The narrative “out there” is...

- Every person for themselves.
- That only the strong survive.
- That what I have is mine.
- That Caesar, with whatever name he or she currently uses, is the one who controls how the story will go.

Easter claims something very different.
Easter claims that God determines the direction of the story and what the final chapter will be.
Crucifixion, in whatever way it happened then or happens today, does have the final word.

- Death is not the end of the story.
- Stones can and will be rolled away.
- The power of world that still stands guard suddenly will become “like dead men” and fall to the ground.

We are left to decide which version of the story is true.
And which version of the story stands at the center of who you are.

And the Easter story is about *courage*.

- The courage to step out from behind those places and those excuses that we use to hide from God and from each other and from that which God calls us to do and be.
- The courage to live as if the story were true and to do your best to go towards those places where Jesus already is.

“Do not be afraid,” the angel said. The one who looked like lightning and who scared Caesars’ guards to death. “Jesus is not here. He goes before you to Galilee.”

Then running from the garden not quite knowing what to think or what to believe Matthew tells us that the women ran smack dab into Jesus who echoes the words the angel spoke only a moment before. “Do not be afraid,” Jesus said. “I go before you to Galilee. There you will see me.”

Do you get the sense that this is important?
“Do not be afraid... I go before you to Galilee...”

But, pay attention...

Galilee, is not just a physical place.

Not just that place in Israel where Jesus lived and taught.

Galilee is that place...

All those places where you live and work.

- Galilee is where you go when you go from here.
- Galilee is where you go when you leave home each day.
- Galilee is where you will meet Jesus...if you go expecting to find him there.

Maybe that is resurrection.

Maybe that.

Amen.