

*A sermon preached by the Rev. Robert L. Hart, Easter Sunday, 2009, Acts 10:  
34-43, Psalm 118: 14-17, 22-24, Colossians 3: 1-4, Mark 16: 1-8*

*Everything belongs to the God of goodness.*

*Everything that exists belongs to the God of beauty.*

*Every created thing belongs to the God of Wisdom.*

*Every human being belongs to the God of justice.*

*+To God be glory in the Risen Christ. Amen.*

Last week as the altar guild was polishing all of the brass I stopped to take a closer look at some of the treasures of this church. When you pause to really see, you begin to notice patterns. The beautiful cross on the old high altar has English ivy twining up the vertical beam and across the arms. The cross on the altar of St. Michael's Chapel has the same ivy cast into it. In fact three of the five processional crosses have ivy winding throughout. Once you start to notice you can't stop. On the wonderfully stenciled walls of the choir, a vine grows around the crosses, up towards the gilded vault above us. And a grape vine with bunches of ripened grapes twines across the communion rail.

Our spiritual forebears who built and decorated this church were well aware of the message they wrote in beauty on these ornaments and decorations of our worship. They believed, as do I, that this world reveals God's creative presence and loving providence. St. Augustine wrote centuries ago, "I said to all things that exist and throng the gateways of the senses: 'Tell me of my God.... Tell me something of God.' All things cried out, 'God made us.' My question was my gazing on them, and their answer was their beauty."

English Ivy is one of the things of God's beautiful creation. It is green, abundant, remains verdant throughout the winter and grows upward towards the light. Ivy decorating the instrument of torture called the cross completes the story of Jesus. God did not let the oppressive, cruel power of worldly tyranny have the last word. God is life and light. That which the Romans thought would kill became instead the means of life.

Nothing has so much power as beauty – be it natural beauty or that made by human artistry. Beauty reveals God and speaks a message. The beauty of this church proclaims to us on this day, the day of Christ's resurrection. It says God is life and gives life. God restores life and brings our lives back to their original beauty.

It's said the story of the Bible begins in a garden, Eden, and ends in a city, the new Jerusalem, both of them filled with beauty and the presence of God. But notice in the Book of Revelation what kind of city it is, this heavenly Jerusalem. A river of the water of life flows right through the golden city with its walls of jasper, a river flowing from the throne of God. And along this river in the midst of the glorious city are trees producing exquisite fruit. And the leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations. The Risen Christ, the Lamb of God, is at the center of this city and this Risen Christ is the light of the city and of all the people of God.

In the midst of God's beautiful city is an abundant garden. The trees of that garden heal the nations of their war, poverty and oppressive greed. In God's city there is beauty and healing and the water of life.

The message of Easter Day, the resurrection of Jesus , is about death's defeat and the victory of Life. And the vision the earliest Christians had of what this means is a golden city filled with a garden that produces sweet fruit for the eating and leaves for the healing of the wounds of humankind.

This beautiful old church adorned with flowers, filled with radiant glass, with its gilt ceiling and marble sanctuary has this same message imbedded its beauty. Christ is Risen and the New Jerusalem of the Risen Lord has come down among you to nourish you in bread and wine, to heal you and give you life. The Risen Jesus says, "Come, you who are thirsty and drink of the water of life."

The beauty of this church on this Easter day writes on our hearts that the Risen Christ is the medicine of life and that this is a corner of Paradise in the city of God and of the Lamb upon the throne. We hear that One call to us. Let the scent of God's garden bring sweetness to the bitterness of the world outside these doors. Let this beautiful Easter temper the curse that lies across the land. For the paradise of the Risen Jesus is the life-breath, the healing of this diseased world.