

Easter Sermon 2008
The Very Reverend Dr. Philip C. Linder

Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.

The story of the first Easter as reported in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, stand on their own richness and varied descriptions of just what took place on the morning come to be known throughout the Christian world as Easter. We cannot add to the story that God has written, but rather we come to it each year of our Christian lives seeking to understand its truth, so that we may more fully live as a people of the resurrection. The words, "He has risen from the dead," spoken from the empty tomb, both transformed the world and shaped her history forever.

Within less than two years I have witnessed two deaths in two settings; one at home, and one at hospital, and both for very different reasons, very significant people in my life. I have come to understand being with a person as they die to be both a privilege and a blessing. There was a time I probably would not have made such a statement, but then there was a time that I did not believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ with both the confidence and power that I do today. It is not that I have ever questioned the resurrection of Jesus, but today I believe with the understanding of the fullness of not only Christ's resurrection, but the power it has had and continues to have to transform our lives and the world.

Unlike the Gospel of Matthew's resurrection account, the Gospel of John portrays the Risen Lord as appearing to Mary within a close distance from the tomb. Mary is crying outside of the tomb—crying because of the death of her loved one, now intensified as she fears someone has taken away Christ's body. Crying at the bedside of a loved one that has died is both a human and compassionate response; fear of the unknown...of what to do next is also a normal response. Mary is in just that state of mind when Jesus calls her by name. "Mary." And when Jesus calls her by name she recognizes him as "Rabbouni," as her beloved teacher and Lord. This is a beautiful and powerful account of the resurrection. But it is what happens next that points to what can be our response.

Mary Magdalene announces to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!" Mary is like God announcing the resurrection. To be like God, to carry the resurrected Lord within you is the response that we too can live out. I should defer here to my colleague from Ghana, Canon Mercer. Instead though I will share these words from South African Archbishop and Nobel Peace Prize recipient, Desmond Tutu. Bishop Tutu has discussed what in African culture is known as *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* speaks to the essence of what it means to be human, and *Ubuntu* concludes that it is impossible to be human apart from relationships with other human beings. That is, to be human is not a solitary experience. We need each other to be fully human as God has intended. And this is one of the significant impacts of the resurrection of our Lord. When God raised His Son from physical death on the third day, the power of that event was realized as individuals

from Mary Magdalene to the apostles to the Jews and Gentiles carried the resurrected Lord within their very hearts, minds, bodies and souls to others.

This may sound to us like it would have to be heroic, and yet it may happen at so many levels and in so many ways. At my former parish in Atlanta, there was a quiet woman in her seventies named Margaret. Margaret volunteered at the receptionist desk once a week, and never missed the Wednesday morning Eucharist and healing service. But what Margaret did for me was pray. Early on in my nine-year ministry at Holy Trinity, Margaret told me that she prayed for me every day. Margaret was someone I could go to and ask for particular prayers for special needs and concerns within the church. Margaret was one that carried the resurrected Lord within her very being. Each year Margaret would bake me a great big box of Christmas cookies—to my surprise those cookies were sent to me here in Columbia the next two Christmases. I shouldn't have been surprised though because that was Margaret. On the third Christmas here at Trinity the cookies did not come...and I knew what that meant. The woman that so quietly carried the Lord to everyone she met, now was with Him in heaven.

During these last 40 days of Lent, we focused as a community of faith through our guest preaching series upon the Christian response to the 8 UN Millennium Development Goals to 1. eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; 2. achieve universal primary education; 3. promote gender equality and empower women; 4. reduce child mortality; 5. improve maternal health; 6. combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; 7. ensure environmental stability; and, 8. develop a global partnership for development. How are you carrying the resurrected Lord into the world to make a difference for our fellow human beings and for God?

In the poem the "Prayer of the Chalice," Francis Nuttall writes:

Father, to Thee I raise my whole being, a vessel emptied of self. Accept Lord, this my emptiness, and so fill me with
Thyself - Thy Light, Thy Love, Thy Life - that these, Thy precious Gifts may radiate through me and overflow the chalice of my heart into the hearts of all with whom I come in contact this day revealing unto them the beauty of Thy Joy and Wholeness and the serenity of Thy Peace which nothing can destroy.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, the hope of Easter, is made real today, when we take on resurrection as our nature and carry it to those who are near and those who are far. We are asked by God to be bearers of Jesus Christ to all—and yes even to the world. This Easter as we raise the chalice of wine at the altar, the very essence of Christ, may you be filled anew with the presence and love of the resurrected Lord. Helen Keller once said, *When we do the best that we can, we never know what miracle is wrought in our life, or in the life of another.* Let the risen Christ take over your life, and be the risen Christ to another. +AMEN.