



*Rev. Christ Taylor - 04.12.2020*  
*Resurrection!*

You will no doubt notice that I'm wearing a tie this morning. That's my way of acknowledging that this is no ordinary Sunday but rather the high point in our Christian calendar. Today we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus; a day, a moment, that has changed the course of human history.

I wish, of course, that we could be together – together in the warmth and intimacy of Fellowship Hall or together in our magnificent sanctuary; those two places that have come to feel like home to so many of us. I wish I could see your faces and hear your voices as we join in one of the great hymns of the church. I wish I could hear the organ and watch the choir in their blue robes processing down the center aisle, joyfully proclaiming that Jesus Christ is risen today.

Of course there is a sense in which we are together. Not the usual sense, but together even so. There are these invisible lines of the internet that are joining us in this moment around a shared experience. In their own way they bring to mind what we've long referred to as the mystical bonds of Christ's body: unseen, unfelt, but real and eternal nevertheless, joining us to Christ and to each other in that organic space where his own Spirit is moving. We are a part of that body; joined with all who have gone before and all who are yet to come as part of God's own family, the Church universal.

So no, this isn't the same as being able to see and touch and hear each other. That day will come, perhaps as early as the first Sunday of May. Maybe later. But that doesn't make the connection we do have any less real. It is just different. A different way of being together. Different, like that new and different dimension which is God's Kingdom; all around us, present here, but unlike those dimensions of this world that we can touch and feel and see.

It is that Kingdom which broke into our world with Christ's arrival. It is that Kingdom which he came proclaiming. All around us, as near as the air we breathe. The very presence of God. Life as God intended it to be lived. Through Jesus we can begin to taste it and experience it for ourselves. Not in all of its fullness. No, that's yet to come. But we can catch a glimpse here and there as we open our lives to him.

The very first line of our text this morning hints at that new world that has broken into our midst, “After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning. Dawn of the first day. It speaks to us of Genesis and the beginning of time. A new beginning. A whole new world beginning to emerge. A world that is the same but in which everything is different.

I like the way preacher Thomas Long puts it in his commentary on this text: “Somewhere along the path to the cemetery... [the two women] left one world and entered another. Without even knowing that they had crossed the border, they left the old world, where hope is in constant danger, and might makes right, and peace has little chance, and the rich get richer, and the weak all eventually suffer under some Pontius Pilate or another, and people hatch murderous plots, and dead people stay dead, and they entered the startling and breathtaking world of resurrection and life.”

That’s what happened on that day so long ago. Hope broke in. Light pushed back against the darkness. And while all the old things – the cruelty, the injustice, the grief and loss – while all those things continued to be, now there was something else in the mix. Something greater. Something full of wonder, and beauty and hope.

It reminds me of one of those movies that starts out in black and white. You become accustomed to it, engrossed in it. It becomes the world that you are inhabiting in that moment and you don’t know anything different. And then at some crucial point, color is introduced. The screen comes alive and the warmth and beauty of it all almost overwhelms the senses.

It is the same world, but it is not. Something fundamental has shifted, and we experience it in an altogether new and different way. It feels like we are really seeing it for the very first time. It is a different world we meet when we turn to Jesus Christ.

Do you remember what it was like when you first began to read? Your sense of excitement and the pride you felt as this whole new world opened up before you? Street signs and books and posters on a wall. The same world, but now you were experiencing it in a different way; information and meaning and stories everywhere you looked!

That’s what happens when the truth of what God has done for us begins to penetrate our hearts and minds. It changes everything; changes the way we look at the world around us, changes what we value and where we find meaning and the kind of choices that we make. In Jesus we meet the deepest truth of who we are and who we were meant to be.

Two thousand years ago a carpenter named Jesus became a rabbi, and he talked about love and he talked about God and then, just three years into it, he died. He was arrested, and crucified, and buried him in a nearby grave.

And that could have been the end of it. That should have been the end. Guards were posted to make sure it was the end. But at dawn of the first day something happened that shook and changed the world. Jesus was raised from the dead.

The two Mary's were the first to find out. They knew he was dead. They had seen him die on the cross, seen his body removed and carried to the tomb where it was wrapped in a linen cloth and laid to rest. He was dead. There was no question for them or for any of his followers. They had spent the days since wrrenched by grief. This trip to the grave wasn't with the expectation of finding something different. They came to mourn. They came to remember. They came to say goodbye.

What they found instead, of course, was an empty grave and this blindingly bright messenger of God telling them that Jesus had been raised from the dead. And they believed. They were afraid, but we are told that they were also filled with great joy. Jesus, whom they loved, was alive! Through their faith, through their belief, hope and light had already broken in. And that's when Jesus met them. After they believed. After they were on their way to tell the other disciples. After they had opened their hearts to the truth of the resurrection.

For most of us, that's when Jesus shows up. Not before we believe so that we might come to faith. But afterwards. After we have made the choice to believe. After we have begun to step forward on the basis of it. That's when he meets us. That's when Jesus reveals himself to us – not in a blinding, irresistible flash, but in a warming of our hearts; or in a quiet, pervasive sense of unexpected peace or joy; or in the realization that our world now is filled with color and with a hope unlike anything we've ever known before. Make that choice to believe and Jesus shows up.

You've seen the trolleys in San Francisco – it might have been in person or on tv or in some movie, but almost all of us have seen them at some point. I've never been on one, but somewhere in the back of my mind there is this very clear image of a person coming up beside one of those trolleys as it moves forward and taking hold of the railing at the back, allowing the motion of the car itself to swing him up and into the vehicle.

Faith is like that. You take hold and then find yourself pulled up into Christ's own life; a whole new way of being. You become part of something greater than yourself; something beautiful and alive and in constant flux. You become a part of Christ's body – this vessel, this space where Christ is present, where his Spirit is moving, and where God's will is done. And what you taste is God's own Kingdom.

That's what those two Mary's found in the glad good news of Jesus' resurrection. They believed. They entered that space. They found great joy.

That is what God offers us in the gift of God's Son. Forgiveness. Salvation. God's own Kingdom in this life, and for all eternity. All it takes is that first step, that choice to believe, that glad embrace of faith which opens our lives to the swift movement of Christ's own Spirit (like that trolley moving forward) and who then takes hold of us and draws us up into a whole new way of being – the same world, but now so remarkably different.

Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.

