



Sermon for Easter Day  
Rev. Jonathan Stepp  
April 12, 2020

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Years ago, when Lewis was much younger, we were at my parents' house for Easter Sunday dinner. We had all just sat down at the table and said grace when Beth started dishing food onto Lewis's plate. Suddenly Lewis cried out, "O God, you can raise yourself from the dead but you can't stop me from having to eat broccoli!"

Somewhere in that cry of anguish from a nine year-old is an anguish that we have all felt, or will someday feel, at different times in our lives. It is the cry that goes from humanity to the throne of God and asks that simple but deeply felt question: why has the God who raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead not used his mighty power to save me?

What we need to be saved from is as broad as the human experience. Why hasn't God healed me of my illness? Why didn't God spare my children from the suffering they experienced? Why did God allow my friend to die young? And, yes, even the seemingly trivial: why can't God save us from having to eat broccoli?

On this first Sunday of Easter I think it is okay to pause for a moment and consider how disconnected the story of Jesus' resurrection is from most of our day-to-day experience. When our friends die we do not see them rise from the tomb three days later. When we are diagnosed with illnesses it seems that medical science has as much to do with whether we recover as God's miraculous power does. And for every time that we have experienced the inexplicable and miraculous answer to our prayer we must admit that we can count many more occasions when God has seemed to remain silent and allow our suffering to simply run its course.

For every time when we have lifted up the joyful paschal shout, "Alleluia! Christ is risen!" there have also been many times when we have cried out the painful paschal lament, "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

What we are experiencing is something that theologians sometimes call the “already and the not yet.” Christ is already raised from the dead but the day of humanity’s resurrection has not yet come. The life of the world to come has already begun in Christ and in the preaching of the Church but the fullness of what that life will be has not yet been revealed. We are already experiencing the joy of God’s work to save us from sin, fear, and death but our full deliverance has not yet been realized.

I am mindful this morning of at least three ways that we experience this “already and not yet” in our day-to-day lives.

First of all, there are some things in life which God has called us to let go of. These things will never be resurrected. And that is a good thing. You don’t really need your plaid bell-bottoms back from 1977. None of us need our past sins, regrets, and sorrow to be raised from the dead. They are better left dead and gone and there is a lesson for us in that. Sometimes we want God to preserve the life of something we cherish – or give back to us through resurrection some cherished thing that we have lost – and we don’t yet recognize that desire is not good.

I remember that sometimes when my kids were much younger that I would lament the passing of some stage of their lives. I would think, “oh well, they’re off to kindergarten, that’s the end of their toddler years.” And then later, “oh well, they don’t think my jokes are funny anymore, that’s the end of their sense of humor.” There’s always that temptation in parenthood to nostalgia, to wish at some level we could have kept them at some age of innocence or simplicity, but God has designed us to love what was while being willing to let go of it in order embrace what will be. I’ll never receive my 5 year-olds back; instead God has given me something much more wonderful: young adults and all the joy that they bring.

Secondly, we sometimes don’t recognize resurrection even when it has happened. We see this throughout the gospel accounts of the resurrection, including in John’s version which we read this morning. Jesus has been raised from the dead, the whole nature and course of human existence has been altered, and yet the disciples struggle with doubt, disbelieve each others’ stories, and sometimes simply stare in shock and amazement.

I’m reminded in this regard of my journey to the Episcopal Church. As most of you know, I didn’t grow up as an Episcopalian and when I left my role as a pastor in another denomination to come to the Episcopal Church it was a kind of death of my old world. In that case it was a good thing, I wanted to come to the Episcopal Church and I believed that God was calling me here, but there was still a process of letting go of the past

and embracing the future. I even wrote a prayer for myself at the time asking God to raise me up to a new life and new ministry in the Episcopal Church. The transition happened so gradually, though, that I often found myself not realizing how far along the journey I had come until after I had passed a marker point. Suddenly, one day, I realized “hey, I’m a confirmed Episcopalian.” Then I woke up one morning and it really sank in to me, “hey, I’m an Episcopal deacon,” and then one morning I woke up and I was a priest. Easter Sunday is a day for us to pause and ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to the places in our lives where resurrection has already taken place and we’ve just missed it.

Finally, God’s work to make all things new is a process and we are called to patient faith as that process unfolds. There are some things, some people, and some experiences that we have lost, which God has not called us to let go of, and yet God has also not yet resurrected.

That is where faith comes in. Faith is not a feeling of belief that we work up within ourselves to try to force God to do what we want. And faith is not a demand that God bring about resurrection when and where and how we want it done. Faith is simply the act of trusting that the God who raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, and who has brought about resurrection before in our lives, will – when the time is right – act again to bring about resurrection. And that, eventually, all things in heaven and on earth that need to be raised from the dead will be raised. Faith is the knowledge that what we are witnessing on this Easter Sunday morning is just the beginning of the new heavens and the new earth that God is bringing into existence as an eternal home for his beloved humanity.

So we begin our 50 Easter days of saying and singing our “alleluias.” Alleluia, Christ is risen. Alleluia, we have been, we are being, and we will yet be raised up with him. Alleluia, the Lord is risen indeed.