

“Raised with Christ”
Easter Day, April 9, 2023
Scripture: Colossians 3:1-4; Matthew 28:1-10

I have to admit, I’m always at a bit of a loss what to say about Easter that people need to hear. I know I’ve said this before, but in some ways it’s a story that speaks for itself. It doesn’t really require my interpretation. I will say, though, that considering we have so many very different versions of those events in the gospels, we have permission, I believe, to think for ourselves what it means. For whatever reason, scripture doesn’t impose a single story; it just sort of lays out options.

I’ve come to believe that the reason there are so many ways of talking about what happened that day is the indescribable nature of the experience of resurrection. One significant “tell” the gospel writers reveal is none of them describes the moment Jesus is actually raised. Matthew’s story comes closest. In this story we find two of the women, Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary,” going to the tomb just to see it. So, they’re not going in this version to prepare the body for a proper burial; they aren’t anticipating even seeing the body, since we’ve already been told there was a Roman guard keeping people away. But as they approach there’s an earthquake and the stone at the mouth of the tomb is moved by an angel. Yet Jesus does not emerge. He’s already gone. Again, we’re left to figure out what resurrection is for ourselves.

In essence that’s what the rest of the New Testament, even the succeeding story of the Church itself, is all about. What does resurrection mean for us? Whoever wrote Colossians thought they knew. And it seems to have nothing at all to do with what happens after we die. “You have been raised with Christ,” we’re told, “for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” For this writer resurrection means a transition from old life to new life. Something in us is put to death, call it ego or the old self, and the you you are meant to be is raised. Your life, your true life, is now utterly enfolded in Christ.

A little earlier in the letter, the writer shares what might have been a sort of affirmation of faith familiar to the readers when it says: “Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.” That’s a mouthful, but it says Jesus’ resurrection isn’t for his sake alone, or even for our sake, but reveals a universal reality. There is nothing beyond the scope of the Divine. In his book *The Universal Christ*, Father Richard Rohr puts it this way, “Resurrection is about the whole of creation, it is about history, it is about every human who has ever lived and died a tortured death, every element that has changed from solid, to liquid, to ether, over great expanses of time. It is about you and it is about me. It is about everything.”

And once we realize we are raised with Christ, once we accept that new reality and stop fighting it, everything around us changes. We understand God in a new way and we see the world with new eyes. So much of our lives is spent trying to justify ourselves, trying to establish our place in the world over and against others. We feel we’re constantly battling to hold onto to our status or our influence or our relevance. So everything is a competition: me against you, us vs. them. Resurrection reveals that all of that is invalid. It’s pointless. Through resurrection we

are connected to one another; we're awakened to the truth that God is present everywhere and we are freed from struggling against each other.

Because we are raised with Christ, we are freed from our destructive need to label others as enemies or threats. We're freed from our desire for retribution on those we feel have wronged us. We're freed from seeing the world as some twisted zero-sum game where anything good that happens to you must be bad for me. Instead we can seek the well-being of others who are different from ourselves, regardless of religion or skin color or gender identity or any other difference we concoct, knowing they too are raised with Christ, swept up in the resurrection, God's eternal "Yes!" for us all.

Maybe that's why the women ran from the tomb filled with fear and joy. They were overwhelmed by freedom sweeping over them and couldn't wait to get back to their friends to share it. When Jesus meets them on the road their astonishment is complete. They fall to the ground and take hold of him to be sure he's real. And if we search our hearts, if we let ourselves be shaped by God's compassion and love, then resurrection can become real for us as well. We, too, can be enfolded, hidden, in the presence of Christ. We can be made new, raised with Christ, no longer driven by hatred or fear but filled with joy. My friends, freedom is calling. For Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen