

Easter SUNDAY 2008

“If you have been raised with Christ seek the things that are above.”

In my previous church we had a system for the hard of hearing that transmitted by a mini radio station to little pocket radios we had in certain pews. The hearing impaired would put the earpiece in their ear and we would actually broadcast to them.

Now since people in the Episcopal Church who are hard of hearing always like to sit in the back, for some reason, we put the pocket radios in the last two rows. The first Sunday we used them I noticed an elderly woman in the rear of the church who had the broadest smile on her face. I could see it was a smile of supreme pleasure so as she left the church I said, “Matilda, I could see by your expression that you were really enjoying the sermon. To which she replied, “Oh, no!” “I was listening to the Yankee game and they were ahead 17 to 3.”

That's a joke but this is true. There was a woman in the back Mary, who had lost 90% of her hearing as a child who was also smiling who put the ear piece to a large hearing aid she had hanging around her neck and I asked her if it helped. To my joy she said she could hear the service for the first time in her adult life. As a matter of fact she told her audiologist who then on the basis of that experience scheduled an operation and her hearing was all but restored. “There's no hope,” they told her. She originally was given no hope. But she didn't believe that. Somewhere deep in the recesses of her being was the possibility, she knew, that someday she would hear. Her hope was validated, and that my friends is resurrection.

Easter is about resurrection and resurrection is about hope and restoration.

It's not about Easter Bunnies, chocolate, hats and new itchy clothes. Easter is about hope and restoration. For some hope is hard, difficult. Life can be difficult.

There was a 20th century philosopher named Alfred North Whitehead, who spoke about what he called "the perpetual perishing" nature of life. His sensitivity certainly came in losing a son in the slaughter of WWI. This was followed by a constant loss of persons, experiences, and the loss he saw of society's significant values. He deduced from this that nothing of value seems to last.

The happy moment, the beauty of youth, of nature, of friendship, agility of body and mind, all seems to leave us and hope, he thought, becomes transient at best.

Depressing, at best.

The very first funeral I did was in a church cemetery from revolutionary times and while I waited for the family to arrive I looked at the tombstones and noticed how many children were buried there. Those were the days before modern medicine when if a child survived, families considered themselves fortunate indeed. Life and death were not friendly neighbors but neighbors indeed.

But there is something inside of most of us. Their faith was strong in those days. Oh, it can get driven into the solitary confinements of our psyche by the difficulties of life but resurrection is built into all of life. It's hard to kill hope even though some of us try hard to do it.

In order for us to find resurrection in our own life we have to be alert to the resurrections around us.

It is the gist of a book by a British theologian by the name of H. A. Williams called "True Resurrection." He writes

of a dissolute person who suddenly makes a radical turn in their life and begins to be adult, sober and responsible. Or the marriages that are going nowhere, then something happens that turns the marriage into a meaningful relationship. He tells of a friend's bitter betrayal and the power of forgiveness and friendship.

He says these are legitimate experiences of resurrection. They are all around us. They happen all the time. They are not spooky or weird. They are believable and they renew this present life with joy and meaning.

The walkway to our house is surrounded with new life bursting through the ground. Tulips with red and yellow heads will be alerting us to spring. Crocuses will adorn our lawn; the song of birds will tickle our ears. The sun will once again begin to warm us. Spring is resurrection.

I think one of the happiest moments of my life was when I awoke in intensive care in October saw my family and friends. You couldn't tell me then there was no resurrection. Someone came into my room and said, "I'm so sorry this happened to you and I said, "What?" "Are you kidding, this is probably the best thing that ever happened." Resurrection is about second chances.

We live in the midst of resurrections every moment of our lives. If this is true and I guarantee it is. Can it be so difficult to believe that the power and presence of Jesus survived the cross and empowered His followers to carry on His mission? No!

Our problem is not the resurrection. Our problem is that we have been cultured to see the resurrection of Christ as the end of the story.

We gather around the manger on December 25th feeling all warm and secure as we look adoringly at the holy child in the manger. A holy child filled with promise. The candlelights

and the angels singing, it all sounds very good but have we looked closely, it is a child born in poverty, homeless and in a filthy stable. What we feel is hope in spite of the reality of the situation. We then look to the Cross. We feel sorrow because we know we have sinned and that sin made this not only possible but necessary.

Now we take a last look at Easter and the cross is empty, the tomb is empty and Christ has been victorious over even death and we have hope. And we Christians conclude, they lived happily ever after.

No! No! No! WE ARE THE REST OF THE STORY. We cannot walk away and not be witnesses to this. We cannot leave hope behind. We have a responsibility to be Easter people; people of the resurrection. No matter how bad a situation can be God always offers us the hope of the future. We know that, tell the story. Alleluia, Alleluia! Amen!!!