

April 4, 2010

The Feast of the Resurrection - Easter Day

Luke 24:1-12

All Saints' Episcopal Church, Atlanta, Georgia

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HOPE AND CHANGE

Alleluia. Christ is Risen.

Do you remember what it is like to fall in love? All those thoughts. Could this be the real thing? Is this possible? Might this happen? The same questions when a team you are playing on might win the tournament. Your mother is convinced that you will win and you ignore her. (As it was for Peter at the resurrection, these words seemed to you an idle tale and you brushed them aside.) But all the same you wonder against all sense whether it might not be possible that you could win this one. Or you have grown weary of applying for jobs in this economy? The wolf is at the door and a prospective employer finally calls you back and wants to know if you might be available for an interview. Just one, after all these months, and you find yourself not wanting to believe but really wishing that this could be the break you've been needing. Do you know what those feelings are? Because if you do, you know what the women at the tomb knew and that is real hope. Real hope is: the possibility of change and newness of life almost against reason. You know something about hoping for change.

Earlier this year we were treated to the news of a former governor of Alaska who apparently has Presidential aspirations asking a crowd "How's that hopey-changeey thing working out for ya?" She was whipping up the party faithful at the time, but before we cheer or jeer at either the questioner or the questioned it is worth pointing out the obvious: we will all be much happier if we avoid assigning messianic expectation to politicians. They are guaranteed to disappoint us if we lay such a burden on them. At the same time Sarah Palin's question is not such a bad question for Christians on Easter Day. How are those promises of a reasonable and holy hope along with the reality of newness of life working out for you? How is it going? How is the reality of Jesus' resurrection making a difference in your life?

There is at least one aspect of the resurrection that is a curious source of a reasonable and holy hope. That lies in the reality that there was nothing *Jesus* could do to bring about this change. The scriptures are inclined to say that in the resurrection when God raised Jesus from the dead, Jesus was *vindicated*. Against all charges of blasphemy, treason, rebellion and the like, Jesus was vindicated. He was shown to be whom and what he claimed to be. He went to his death on Friday keeping faith with the source of his life. On the third day God raised him out of death, cleared of all charges, God made manifest. This reality was made

manifest to his followers in spite of Peter's dismissal of the account of Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, the mother of James, and the others who bore witness.

Tom Long, the Bandy Professor of Preaching at the Candler School of Theology was our guest preacher at lunchtimes this week and one day told the story of how he had been pulled over by a policeman and charged with 'obstructing the flow of traffic'. He did not take this lying down and he went and looked up the exact law that he was alleged to have broken. He checked the 'Lexis Nexis' legal data base at the law school and he filled a manila folder with papers that proved to anyone who would listen that he had not contravened the traffic laws of the land. The time came for his day in court. The judge entered and Tom Long was called to the bench. Filled with anticipation he went forward only to be told that the policeman who had given him the ticket had left the police force. There was therefore no one to testify against him and he was free to go.

Tom recognized that he was not altogether happy about this. He wanted to make his case, to demonstrate his innocence, to enjoy a victory. Instead he had to recognize that there was something in him (as there is in most, if not all, of us) that would rather be right than free. He was free to go with no one to bear witness against him, *but* he had not been vindicated. He had not been shown to be *right*. He had been granted only half of what he wanted. The truth is that in the end, for all of us, real vindication and real freedom are only in the gift of God and never something we can achieve ourselves. This is part of the truth and consequence of Jesus' resurrection: that being declared right or made righteous is God's gift. As I like to put it, being brought into right relationship with God and all of creation, is, in the end, an act of supreme grace. More than that, such vindication is an act of grace that overturns everything that is deathly in this world. All of our pretensions, all of our sin, all of our violent instincts are overturned by grace. Even the power of death is vanquished in the grace of God. With St. Paul we can cry "Oh death where is thy victory? Where is thy sting?"

In the resurrection, we are shown the way of integrity, the way of wholeness and the way of life. In Jesus we find the seeds of real change and real newness of life. He went to his death in a way that unmasked or unveiled the mechanisms by which we try and justify ourselves; and then do violence upon violence to keep us from having to face the possibility that we are caught up in death. We do not have to be Pilate and Herod conspiring to go along with the crowd and to settle their problem by creating a victim. We manage our anxieties in similar ways every day: creating a sense of togetherness when we criticize someone who is not present; when we turn on people point out behavior of which we are ashamed and make them the issue; when we whip up populist fear or rage for our own ends. In other words we participate in the way that leads to death whenever we use power to create distinction at the expense of another. Jesus showed all that for what it is when he refused to answer at his trial and merely suggested that he was the victim of a kangaroo court. The price of that integrity was his life. It is our fear of death that keeps us caught in those mechanisms of violence and oppression. In

the resurrection a new way is opened to us: one in which we know that death need never be the last word in life and making possible our living with the courage to have integrity and to be ever more fully the people we were created to be.

Hope is like falling in love or beginning to think that we might win a tournament or get a job. Living into this newness of life, fueled by a reasonable and holy hope is a long term task, not something done overnight or in the twinkling of an eye. But on this day in particular we can say without shame or fear that the hopey-changey thing, the messianic expectation that we hold fast and hold dear is working out pretty well for us and also for all whom God has made. It is why we say with confidence: Alleluia. Christ is Risen. AMEN.