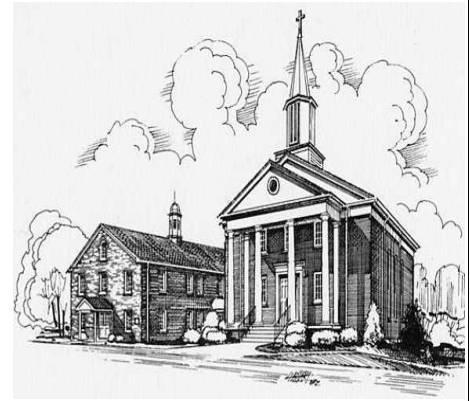


The Lessons Appointed for Use on

Easter Day

Principal Service
Year C
RCL

- Isaiah 65:17-18
- Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
- John 20:1-18



The Collect

O God, who made this most holy night to shine with the glory of the Lord's resurrection: Stir up in your Church that Spirit of adoption which is given to us in Baptism, that we, being renewed both in body and mind, may worship you in sincerity and truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The First Lesson

Isaiah 65:17-18

I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Confitemini Domino

1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his mercy endures for ever.

2 Let Israel now proclaim,
"His mercy endures for ever."

14 The Lord is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation.

15 There is a sound of exultation and victory
in the tents of the righteous:

16 "The right hand of the Lord has triumphed!
the right hand of the Lord is exalted!
the right hand of the Lord has triumphed!"

17 I shall not die, but live,
and declare the works of the Lord.

18 The Lord has punished me sorely,
but he did not hand me over to death.

19 Open for me the gates of righteousness;
I will enter them;

I will offer thanks to the Lord.

20 "This is the gate of the Lord;
he who is righteous may enter."

21 I will give thanks to you, for you answered me
and have become my salvation.

22 The same stone which the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.

23 This is the Lord's doing,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.

24 On this day the Lord has acted;
we will rejoice and be glad in it.

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene

went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

SERMON

And now, for the news!

Dateline Frankfort, Kentucky: An itinerant preacher and a small group of his followers staged a protest in front of the capital where they proclaimed their leader to be king.

How long would you expect this story to persist on the news? Let's be honest.

Wouldn't you be surprised to learn that it was reported at all? Talk about a non-event! A bunch of haybubs from the sticks proclaiming one of their own a king? This is not going to go anywhere. It's a non-starter. So, why won't it go away?

It won't go away because something happened two thousand years ago that eclipsed the bare report of the events. As much as our rational, twenty-first century understanding rebels against it, something happened two thousand years ago that overwhelmed our expectations, and nothing was ever the same afterwards. The events of that first Resurrection Day opened the world as upon a hinge, and showed to us a new thing.

I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.

But our secular society protests, "We're Enlightenment people. There must be reasonable explanations for everything and we'll uncover them presently for that is our understanding, our worldview."

We on the Christian side of the discussion can get pretty huffy over talk like that, but we would do well to dial back our huffs, listen to the objections being raised, then inquire how we are to handle the inevitable collision between the story of Easter and the worldview of our time, for we are called to bring the gospel into our time and to do that

we must find ways to speak to the contemporary worldview, rather than to simply condemn it.

The worldview of a culture is the intellectual space within which that culture exists and it is a jealous mistress, for the worldview of a time actually dictates what its people can believe. If we are presented with something which will not conveniently fit within our understanding of how the world works our impulse is to reject it out of hand. Christians must find ways to speak to the worldview of their time, rather than simply condemning it. Christians must also find ways to work in their time without becoming slave to the worldview currently in vogue. Neither course will do. Railing against the worldview of our time just marks you out as a religious nut. The worldview of the people of Jesus' time included a heaven just above the clouds. Our worldview tells us that there is no heaven just above the clouds because we regularly fly airplanes there and we would have noticed. Insisting that heaven **MUST** be there just above the clouds because the Bible says so will only destroy your credibility.

On the other hand, becoming slave to the current worldview does terrible violence to our relationship with God. We have responded to the evidence of science by moving heaven further and further away as we fly spacecraft ever further. In other words, our allegiance to the contemporary worldview has moved heaven beyond our reach! Our attempts to fit God into our worldview have done nothing but damage to our relationship with God. And when the conflict becomes too much to bear, we will move the story of the Resurrection, the single most important story of all time, into a portion of our consciousness inhabited by the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus – sentimental things we love but don't seriously engage in any meaningful way. That won't do. The Resurrection is the hinge upon which the world opens. There is nothing more real, nothing more important, nothing more life-giving. To enter into Resurrection Sunday, we have to expand this worldview which is so precious to us yet so much in our way. History teaches us clearly that we're going to need help. Even the first witnesses stumbled over this new

thing.

John writes:

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

That’s Mary’s worldview speaking. Someone has come and stolen the body. That’s what her worldview, and ours if we would be honest about it, permits her to believe. The body’s gone. Someone stole it.

In Luke’s account, the women fail to find the body in the tomb and run to the Disciples.

Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

It’s an idle tale. Dead men don’t rise. Our worldview, and theirs, dictates that pretty clearly, so there has to be some other explanation because what actually happened will bring our worldview tumbling down around us. To enter into Resurrection Sunday, we have to expand this worldview which is so precious to us yet so much in our way.

And that’s really the point, isn’t it? God has done a new thing. We can permit our worldview to lead us, or we can acknowledge that we are God’s children, and we live in a world He spoke into existence. Our worldview tells us that if we apply ourselves we will continue to rise along a trajectory of understanding which will someday reveal everything. The cross replies, “You are my children. You live within my Grace. That is enough.”

In the late Second Century, Tertullian wrote:

“The Son of God was born: there is no shame, because it is shameful.

**And the Son of God died: it is wholly credible, because it is unsound.
And, buried, He rose again: it is certain, because impossible.”**

In less antique language, “The theory of the Son of God dying and then rising again seems so impossible that nobody would have initially believed it – unless of course it were true, and people had witnessed it.”¹

Something happened two thousand years ago that eclipsed the bare report of the events. As much as our rational, twenty-first century understanding rebels against it, something happened two thousand years ago that overwhelmed our expectations, and nothing was ever the same afterwards. The world has opened upon the hinge of the Resurrection and we are to bring that awareness to a world gone mad.

AMEN

¹ I am indebted to Dr. Glenn Peoples and his blog at <http://rightreason.org/2009/i-believe-because-it-is-absurd-was-tertullian-a-fideist/> for both the quotes and the correction of my earlier misquote of Tertullian.

BENEDICTION

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher).

Mary doesn't know him until he calls her name. We who have been called by name are charged to go into a world which has not yet become aware that the world has been opened as upon a hinge. We must bring the gospel into such a world by the actions of our very lives, every decision we make. "See how they love one another", is the message of our call. Listen for His call! Listen carefully! Let us pray.

"Oh God, save me from myself, save me from myself ... this masterful self which manipulates your creation ... this self which throws the thick shadow of its own purposes and desires in every direction in which I try to look, so that I cannot see what it is that you, my Lord and God, are showing to me. Teach me to stand out of my own light, and let your daylight shine."²

AMEN

² Austin Farrer, Warden of Keble College, Oxford, 1960-1968, as quoted in "Absolute Truths", Susan Howatch

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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