

Easter Sunday
April 24, 2011
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Scriptures: Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 28:1-10

Christ Is Risen!

Easter. This is the story of the Holy Week. This right here is why we do it. This is why we go through all the trouble and the struggle. This is why it matters. This is where we've been walking all this time. You see, Jesus was pointing to the resurrection during his ministry. But many around them would not listen. Many couldn't understand. Many others didn't even want to believe it. Jesus even gave some a glimpse of that glory stemming from God. He took Peter and a few others to the mount where he was transfigured. They had a chance to see where it all was heading. But again, they could not "get it." The reaction to the event of the transfiguration was an attempt to try to keep it, to not lose it. "Let's stay here, let's not go away; let's make three booths so that we can enjoy this for a little longer." In a way, I think, the purpose was to avoid the cross.

Many churches today are preaching a triumphal kind of message. They are singing alleluias and proclaiming "praise be to the Lord." Indeed, just like we've been doing ourselves. We all should celebrate what needs to be celebrated. And we should do it with joyful music and great energy. But we also should be attentive to a potential misplaced or misused theology of glory. Because an emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus that does not take into account how or when or under what conditions it happens, does not seem to allow any kind of space for the cross.

The cross is needed to give Easter its appropriate context. It's not suffering for the mere sake of suffering. It's about raising up. It's about bringing back. It's about restoring life. It's about victory that is better understood and celebrated after we've been to the tomb. Isn't it true that we know what it feels to be joyful because we have mourned before? Don't we enjoy a clear, fresh, sunny day after we've been through cloudy, stormy days before? Aren't beautiful, bright mornings better appreciated after long, dark nights? In the same way, Easter Sunday is celebrated with such emphasis because we have gone through Good Friday before. That's the background against which we understand and celebrate Easter. There's no theology of glory apart from a theology of the cross.

During Lent we did a Bible study series as part of the Discipleship Life initiative of our synod. The more or less general of theme of it was "what can we do better than we can do together?" Behind that question, as I understand it, is the intention of inspiring and encouraging our congregations to become missional. How do we engage our congregations to recover a passion for the mission of the gospel? How do we reach others? Or even, how do we reach those within our own walls with good news of Jesus Christ? Those certainly look and sound like worthy goals in which we can all work. Nevertheless, I have a concern. Many times, maybe by my own fault, our discussions went in the direction of what we can do to save our congregations. We've seen our numbers dwindling

over the years and we seem to think that we should do something to “save” our church from dying. Here’s my question, can we do such a thing?

I think that Easter is as good time as any other to talk together about our church. And I also think that Easter is the ideal time of the year to remind ourselves of things that are important when it comes to talk about church life. We need to remember that we are a people of the resurrection. The church finds its birth precisely in the preaching and proclamation of the resurrection of Christ. We live because he lives. That’s true for each of us individually as much as it is true for us a people, as a church. We believe in a God who has defeated death. God has been to the tomb and has come back. That’s where we come from and is important to keep it in our minds when it comes to talk about the life of the church. It’s what we proclaim in baptism: life and life eternal. I’m not sure that our concern should be on what we do to “save” the church. Our concern, our emphasis, our goal should be to live like people who have such a faith. To live like we truly have been dead and can now celebrate our new life, the resurrection of Christ.

In this day, we remember our baptisms as a way to remember that ultimately our lives, the lives of our communities, the lives of our congregations, the life of the church itself comes from those waters. In baptism we gain life because we participate both in the death and resurrection of Christ. We remember our baptisms today so that we may never forget that indeed it all comes from the grace, mercy, forgiveness, power and life that is in God. We remember our baptism so that we may remember that God has made a commitment with us and us with God to continue living in such a faith. Today we remember our baptism so that we may better understand what it means to proclaim: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!