

Easter Sunday April 20, 2014
The Rev. Elizabeth A.B. Tesi

In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God. The Word was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Happy Easter! Today we tell the story of belief. Three disciples ran to an empty tomb and in it, found the beginning of the Great Story. There, we find the dawn of all truth, that the Word is with God and the Word is God, and that no darkness shall overcome.

John's Easter story is really more about ascension than about resurrection. But let's take a moment and hear this story as the disciples would have experienced it. Remember, each of these people this morning is one of Jesus' closest friends. Mary, who was the first to return to the tomb; Peter, the stalwart and faithful Jew; and the unnamed disciple, beloved of Jesus, who might be John or some say Lazarus. Each of them has traveled with Jesus, and each of them has heard his stories and teaching. Each of them knows Jesus deeply. Each of them knows Jewish story and legend and practice. Peter especially would have been well steeped in his beloved religion. Everyone would have known the Exodus tales. Everyone would have known that when Moses stood in God's presence, his face began to shine with the glory of God. It shown so much, in fact, that Moses had to cover his face with a veil when he went down from the mountain and was around others so that the glory of God reflected on his face would not terrify those he led. Some historians suggest that is the root of the burial custom of covering the face of the dead as they are wrapped into their shroud. They are going to be in the nearer presence of God, and they should approach the Almighty with veiled faces.

What happens today? The beloved disciple sees and believes, as he sees the veil folded up and lying by itself. Jesus no longer needs a veil to hide his face from God, for the Word had returned to God's presence, and the Word was with God, as it was in the beginning. And so, the disciple saw and believed.

Mary and Peter were still a little confused. They brought such a strong life experiences with them, that believing in resurrection and ascension was still a little out of their comfort zone. Today, we have a handy gospel writer, John, who wrote it all out like a little set of Clif notes, bookending the gospel with the proclamation and the proof that the Word is now with God, all laid out so handy for us. But then, it was much more confusing. The idea that the Word was in the beginning, creator and maker of all things, that is a notion we can voice today as a regular part of our religion, but it was not a comfortable notion then.

Then, Mary knew only the pain of knowing that she had lost a beloved friend. She had personally, privately, individually found acceptance and redemption through this friend and has come to believe that he had a special connection to the Almighty. But she was so consumed by her pain that she could not yet grasp the reality of resurrection. Indeed, we often wonder why neither she nor many others could recognize Jesus. Was he so transformed by his pain that his

scars made him unrecognizable? Was he truly Zombie Jesus, bearing the terrible marks of the grave? I don't think so, because I cannot imagine any of us reacting with delight at the decaying features of a zombie, even our most beloved. Personally, I would be grab a crossbow, like everyone knows to do these days! But as she recognizes him in his voice, she reacts with delight.

Let's go back to that veil lying alone. Jesus had entered into the nearer presence of God, and was now deeply in God's true presence. He no longer veiled his face. Maybe he, like Moses, shone with the glory of God. For at last, the Word was one again with God and the Word was God.

And what do we do with that, here in this full and bright church on this Easter morning? We have lit the new fires of hope. We have proclaimed the great Alleluias. What are we to do this afternoon, and tomorrow and all the days after that? Do we just head out and grab a nice bike ride and “experience God in nature” and call it a day? (Disclaimer- I may do just that, for I love my bike and I do experience God in nature.) Do we meet our friends and head out for a decent meal and a bit of rest? (I am going to do that, too!) Do we eat our Easter candy, play with our new Easter toys, and go back to work tomorrow just as we always do? (Really, I do believe your boss will appreciate it if you show up for work tomorrow. Unless you work for me, and I have given you the week as liberal rest time because we worked so hard for the last month and a half!) You certainly could. You could leave this church today, untransformed, and just thinking, 'wow, that pretty little church does a nice little service'.

Or you could accept the challenge of letting this day and this story transform you. Christ has risen from the dead, and his grave clothes lie empty and his face veil lies unneeded. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever, the Word is with God. The creative force that made all things and fashioned us out of the great chaos of nothingness has dwelt with us and now, having known and loved us, is again with The Great Almighty. That changed God's entire relationship with humanity!

I believe you are now called to help transform the world, to make this a greater, more blessed place. I believe you are called to do right to all your fellow people, loving your neighbor as your self. You are called to continue in the Eucharist feast, and in the prayers. You are called to strive for justice and peace, respecting the dignity of every human being—oh, yes, that's every human being. I believe you are called to comfort the sorrowing, to shield the joyous, to pity the afflicted, and all for his love's sake. That is what makes this day, and you and me, different from what we were. We are always growing, always changing, and we are called into transformation. Claim that transformation! We live in a broken, sorrowing, hurting world. You have the power to live as light in that darkness, for in Jesus' resurrection, the Word is with God. The Light we praise shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it. Death, grief, pain, sorrow, torture, calamity, disaster... Darkness does not and cannot and will not ever overcome it. Darkness cannot overcome the love of God proclaimed to us in this risen Word, Jesus, friend of Mary and Peter and the Beloved disciple.

Death is not the end in this tomb. The disciples have found the tomb empty. The grave clothes lie unfilled. The face veil lies apart, unneeded, for the Word is with God, and the Word is God, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be, forever.

Alleluia! Death is conquered, we are free at last, free at last. You are released from your bonds, to go forth into the world proclaiming the truth of the Good News, that Jesus is now and forever with God, immortal, incarnate, eternal Word. Indeed, you faithful, raise that strain of gladness. And lift your unveiled faces to God- and be the Beloved.