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AMDG

Easter A – April 16, 2017

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed alleluia!

What a glorious evening/Sunday on which to celebrate Resurrection! The desert is beautiful. And even if we'd been given a hot, windy, cold, or rainy day on which to celebrate, it would still have been perfect, because we are an Easter people. For us Resurrection is not just an event, or a holiday. For us – the followers of Jesus – Resurrection is a way of life. It is how we live as the beloved of God.

In Easter celebrations, especially in the Western Christian tradition, we tend to put all the focus on Jesus. In art we typically see only the risen Jesus depicted, wearing a white robe, light shining around him. Sometimes you see astounded disciples.

But in Eastern Christian art the Resurrection is depicted not just as a Jesus event, but as a human event. The focus isn't just on Christ, but also **our** resurrection **through** Jesus Christ. We are united to Christ in Resurrection. Eastern Christian icons of the Resurrection depict not the solitary event of Jesus, but an event that involves Adam and Eve, symbolically representing all humankind. Jesus stands upon the symbols of death - chains, locks, broken tombs, flames - to show he has conquered and destroyed death; and he is seen physically raising the dead from their tombs. These dynamic images are typical of how Christians saw the resurrection in the first centuries of the Church.

Writings from those first Christians also express this understanding of the Resurrection. One particular quote that I love is one from *the Book of the Odes of Solomon*, songs that were used by first and second century Christians.

*Truly whoever is united to the one who does not die, neither will he die.
And the one who delights in the Life will become alive.*

United to Christ we do not die. And delighting in life we become alive. Isn't that beautiful?! From the beginning, followers of Jesus, knew this truth and lived in art and music.

In Jesus' life and ministry, he taught us that we had nothing to fear, that all our shame and fear was erased. He tried to show how we were all connected through God's extravagant love, a love that frees us to live boldly and generously. His parables drove home again and again the radical inclusiveness of God's Kingdom. He didn't wait until people professed their faith to cure them; he didn't wait until they repented of their sins to forgive them; He took people as they were. They way God loves us. But the followers of Jesus were a little slow on the uptake, as we see again and again. So, it was Jesus' final acts – his last meal with them, his passion, and his resurrection that helped awaken his disciples to the truth that freed them from timid and bumbling followers to bold and generous apostles.

What proofs do we have in our times to show us that death is an illusion, that if we live life in the love of God, we, like Christ live life eternal? Recently I read a story about a little girl in Utah with alopecia, an autoimmune disorder that causes hair to fall out. It's hard enough being a seven-year-old girl in a society that's so focused on appearance, but to lose your hair? What a challenge for young Giannessa. Then came her school's annual "crazy hair day," in which students are encouraged to express their individuality by doing fun things with their hair. Last year Gianessa formed her tresses into a unicorn horn. How would she approach "crazy hair day" with no hair. But, this spunky girl and her mom, didn't let a little detail like baldness get in their way. They bought sparkly jeweled stickers and made beautiful designs all over her scalp - butterflies, flowers, even an owl. Her classmates thought she was awesome. This is the Resurrection Life.

Two months ago a Victoria, Texas mosque was burned to the ground - an all too familiar story in these hate-charged times. However, the very next

day a local rabbi went to the president of the mosque and handed him the keys to their synagogue so their Muslim brothers and sisters would have a place to worship. Two other local churches stepped forward to offer their spaces, as well. Another example of the Resurrection Life.

These stories show God's people overcoming adversity, fear, prejudice - and boldly living out the Resurrection. But, these stories aren't so surprising. They touch our hearts, because deep inside we know the truth contained in these stories. It is the truth of the Good Samaritan, the truth of Bartimaeus, the truth of the Resurrection. We all know deep in our hearts that as God's beloved we have nothing to fear and nothing can keep us down. We've experienced this truth when we've boldly faced our own difficulties, and found not death, but transformed life waiting at the other side. We've experienced the truth of Resurrection when we've lived life to the full, mocking evil and death by our very exuberance. However, we still struggle. The difficulties we encounter in our lives can distract us, and it can be easy to be deceived into forgetting who we are and whose we are. There are those around us that would pull us into their own dark view of life - a dog eat dog world, where we have to outthink, outperform and outmaneuver our neighbors to eek a miserable existence from an unfriendly universe. That is true death - when we forget that we are God's beloved. Death comes, not when our bodies die, but when we see ourselves as separate from God, separate from one another, separate from creation. The death that is spoken of by Jesus and the prophets is the death that comes when we let fear, anger, and hatred separate us from each other, from God's world, from our true selves, and ultimately from God.

That is why Paul had to encourage the Colossians. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. In other words stop looking around you and seeing death, because there is no death, there is only eternal life. Further in the letter Paul reminds them to put aside the things which separate us, the barriers that come when we see ourselves as separate from one another... greed, dishonesty, anger, abusive language.

Paul passionately reminds them that they have been renewed in the image of their creator and in the resurrection life there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and in all. This is truly living as a people resurrected in Christ. In our exuberant joy of Resurrection, we cannot forget the world abounds with examples of disconnection, of people living as if they are dead. For some the Easter story is clouded, an illusion.

People living in despair... oppressed and exploited.

People living under the painful burden of poverty, or living with debilitating illness or loneliness.

People who let their resentments, prejudices, and fears disconnect them from others and from the love of God.

Where is Easter for them?

We are the Easter. For the despairing and the lonely, for the poor and oppressed, for the sick and suffering, for our fragile environment, for the angry and fearful we are Easter. We are the Resurrected Christ lifting Adam and Eve and all the dead from the grave. And when we share the amazing gift of Resurrection, like Jesus drawing Adam and Eve out of death, we experience it anew. We are resurrected again with Christ.

So my message to you today is simple, do not celebrate Easter, do not celebrate Resurrection...go out and live it. Embrace your eternal life in Christ. Live boldly, generously, lovingly, and joyfully. Get up, and go out into the world rejoicing in your new life. We are risen. We are risen indeed, alleluia!!