

## Sermon for Easter Sunday 2022

Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

Los Alamos, New Mexico

The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney

April 17, 2022

Isaiah 65:17-25

Psalm 118:14-2

Acts 10:34-43

Luke 24:1-12

“On the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body.”

As many of you may know I am a photographer. Photography was my preferred artistic expression long before I studied at the University of New Mexico. The camera lens was the portal through which I saw the world.

I photographed my family at birthdays, anniversaries, family holidays, even at family funerals. My photographs allowed me to crystalize moments so later we could savor the sweetness or salve the bitterness of our lives together.

So I wonder what would I have made of the women going to the tomb to do what needed to be done – the burial rites were required.

With what sadness must they have walked from their homes to the garden where Joseph and Nicodemus had laid their friend. What defining image would I have been able to capture had I been there with my camera?

One of my favorite photos was of the room in which my grandfather died.

He had been ill for some time with a kind of systemic cancer, and once he was unable to care for himself, we brought him to our house to spend his last weeks.

When he had breathed his last, my father called the funeral home, and he and my mother and I went into the bedroom. “Help me,” my mother said to me, and she brought in a bowl and washcloths.

She removed the bedding and took off his night shirt, and collapsed in tears.

“Don’t bother – the funeral people will take care of that,” my father said.

“No, I want to do this myself,” she told him.

She could not stand on her own, so I lifted her and held her so she could clean her father's body of the soil of death.  
It was the one thing I know I did for my mother that no one else could have done.

A few days later I returned home to prepare for the funeral.  
I looked into the bedroom where my Pappa had been.  
I retrieved my camera and snapped the shutter.

The black and white image showed the bed neatly made.  
His wheelchair was closed beside the bed.  
A breeze lifted the lace window shades.  
Sunlight seemed to glow about the bed,  
and reflected off framed portrait of my grandmother on the night stand.  
Her face was smudged from the prints made by my grandfather's lips  
from kissing her face every evening since she had died years before.

I framed the photograph for my mother with its title:  
One last sunset before the eternal dawn.

In our sadness and grief, we found our Easter sunrise.

Alleluia Christ is Risen!  
The Lord is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia!  
Alleluia Christ is Risen!  
The Lord is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia!  
Alleluia Christ is Risen!  
The Lord is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia!

THIS is why they call it Good Friday.  
THIS is what it IS ALL about.  
Without THIS, none of the rest of it makes any sense.  
THIS is Easter.

Every Sunday is about THIS. That's why, even in Lent, Sunday is a feast because every Sunday celebrates Easter.  
In the first several centuries of Christianity, Easter – the resurrection - was all that the faith was about.

Christmas wasn't celebrated then like it is now. It was the resurrection rather than the incarnation that was the focus of the faith. As Isaiah writes:

I am about to create new heavens  
and a new earth;  
the former things shall not be remembered  
or come to mind. ...  
... no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,  
or the cry of distress.  
No more shall there be in it  
an infant that lives but a few days,  
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;  
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,  
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

The resurrection.

An ineffable event that is portrayed not by a description of what happened,  
but by what was not seen.

“... suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them.  
The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men  
said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?  
He is not here, but has risen.”

The tomb was empty.

He is risen.

And I don't mean he was brought back to life.

This is not a reanimation of Jesus' tortured corpse.

Jesus was resurrected: the first fruit of new and unending life in God.

I will give thanks to you, for you answered me \*  
and have become my salvation.  
The same stone which the builders rejected \*  
has become the chief cornerstone.  
This is the Lord's doing, \*  
and it is marvelous in our eyes.  
On this day the Lord has acted; \*  
we will rejoice and be glad in it

We live by faith.

We live by what we cannot see to testify to the trust we hold in God.

So what do we hear on this first Sunday... A message of life:

The LORD is my strength and my song, \*  
and he has become my salvation.  
There is a sound of exultation and victory \*  
in the tents of the righteous:  
"The right hand of the LORD has triumphed! \*  
the right hand of the LORD is exalted!  
the right hand of the LORD has triumphed!"

And more than anything else, the resurrection is a message of reconciliation. Christ's arms were spread wide on the hard wood of the cross to embrace the entire world. That reconciling love for us all is embodied in the reading from Acts. We are all in this together even though we tend to choose who we listen to. The disciples were no different.

Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told ... [the apostles of what they had seen and been told.] But these words seemed to [the men] an idle tale, and [the disciples] did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

But it is Peter who is convinced later that with God there is no partiality. Peter, who has been preaching JUST to the members of his faith, is given a vision of eating that which he would have been prohibited from eating, and he is sent by God to a Roman Centurion of all people. Suddenly, Peter understands the message Jesus had taught. We are all beloved of God.

The resurrection levels the ground between men and women and all those we would consider not "us" but "them."

Please turn to the leaflet of responsive reading.

### **Responsive Scripture Reading**

Acts 10:34-46 / Galatians 3:28 / Colossians 3:9-14

**One:** Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show partiality, but accepts people from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

**Many:** Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

**One:** You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

**Many:** Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, slave or free, male nor female, but Christ is all, and is in all.

**One:** You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

**Many:** Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

**One:** "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

**Many:** Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

**One:** While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.

**Many:** The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Let us pray:

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son:  
Look with compassion on the whole human family;  
take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts;  
break down the walls that separate us, unite us in bonds of love;  
and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth;  
that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you  
in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*