

Sermon for Easter Sunday – April 5, 2015

"Consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." - *Romans 6:11*

How do we find new life?

"Christ was raised....so that we too might walk in newness of life." *Romans 6:4*

"If we have died with Christ we believe that we will also live with him." *Romans 6:8*

Alleluia, Christ has risen! So often, we see Easter as an EVENT. Two thousand years ago, a miracle took place and Jesus rose from the dead. All kinds of explanations for this have been suggested over the years. Perhaps he wasn't really dead to begin with. Or perhaps the disciples were just seeing a ghost or a vision. Some people have simply decided that the whole story is nothing but a myth. However this may be, we know that the Apostles and many to whom they spoke were changed from within. They were filled with joy, courage, and conviction that new life had come into the world through Jesus. They demonstrated it by their faith, teaching, and miracles performed. We have inherited this faith, generation after generation, for two thousand years. But what, exactly, of the original Easter, have we inherited?

I believe that the experience of transformed life, new life, is the miracle of Easter for people of today. It is a reality that transcends time.

This is the message of the Resurrection. This is the good news of the Gospel. Christ's death and Resurrection open a path for new life, resurrected life, in all of us. The Resurrection happens in the human spirit as well as in the body.

St. Paul, to a great extent, had to work this out: how death of the old self can lead to life abundant; everlasting life in the spirit. His conversion on the road to Damascus came at a great price. For a while everyone was afraid of him and didn't trust him. The Christians of Damascus didn't trust him because they thought he might be faking it, and the Christians in Jerusalem because his conversion might not be genuine.

Biblical accounts vary on what happened to Paul, but we know that it was such a huge shift in his mind and soul that he needed to take time out. He writes in the Epistle to the Galatians that he went to Arabia to process his experience. His whole life had turned around. His world view had been turned upside down. His enemies were his friends and his friends were his enemies. How long did he stay there? We only know that 3 years elapsed either in Damascus or Arabia before he embarked on his missionary journeys.

We also, in the same way, need time to process a life changing experience. God can stop us in our own tracks and turn us in a new direction. If a new direction comes from God, rather than from our imagination, we are given strength to make the change. This kind of change can be, for us, a spiritual resurrection.

Examples of this might be, for instance, giving up drugs or alcohol and becoming "sober" or "drug free." It could be a call to ordained ministry or religious life. It can also come through illness, injury or loss of a loved one.

Here is one example. Our friend Paul, a New Jersey resident, experienced two tragedies in a relatively short time. His son died, and then through a medical accident, Paul lost his sight. It was Paul's conviction that young lives can be saved from an opioid drug overdose if the medication "Narcan" is administered in time to reverse the effect of an overdose on the body.

Regardless of his handicap, Paul believed that he could make a difference in the lives of many youth and their families by advocating for laws stating that those who call an ambulance after the overdose of a friend would not be prosecuted. He has since devoted his life to the passage of these laws, county by county, city by city.

Paul, today, lives for others. He adapted to being blind. He experienced a spiritual resurrection. The light shines through Paul.

One person who developed this theme in her teaching is Mother Harriet, the foundress of our Community. Here is one of her Easter messages: "Get a real, living faith in the power of the transformed life in you. Have a loving confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit to recreate all of us in Christ Jesus."

Thomas Keating picks up this theme in his book, *Awakenings*, as he writes of the Easter vigil: "Our new fire is the symbol of the power of the Holy Spirit leaping up from the ground on which Christ's blood was poured out. Then a flame is taken from the fire to light the Paschal candle and we pray, "May the light of the Risen Christ dispel the darkness of our minds and hearts.... This symbol communicates what we celebrate at this vigil...the mystery that takes place inwardly beyond symbols and to which all symbols and words are designed to lead us."

So, what does this spiritual transformation mean? If God, in the Risen Christ, can work miracles of transformation in our lives, how can this happen? This is up to you and to me. St Paul in his letter to the Philippians explains, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you to will and to work for his good pleasure."

May this Easter bring you the gift of new life, new direction, and faith in the power of God to move mountains. Amen.