

Sermon on Easter Day
At St. Paul's Episcopal Church

Isaiah 65:17-25

*I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;*

*the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.*

*But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating;*

*for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.*

*I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;*

*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.*

*They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.*

*They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;*

*for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.*

*They shall not labor in vain,
or bear children for calamity;*

*for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord--
and their descendants as well.*

*Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.*

*The wolf and the lamb shall feed together;
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent-- its food shall be dust!*

*They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.*

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

We have been gathering here this week to consider those spiritual, social, and political forces which were at work in the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus. Attendance is always a bit down during these services-I think because it is a little too similar to the world in which we live and move and have our being.

We consider Pilate, the political bureaucrat who is much more concerned about deflecting blame than he is about resolving any of the pressing problems confronting him. We consider the disciples who lack the courage of their conviction when it appears they are no longer on the winning team. We look upon the centurions who, like many urban policeman of our age, view everyone around them as a threat and treat them as such. We consider the cynicism of Judas, the cowardice of Peter, the indifference of the government. We see something which is a bit too familiar.

As I consider this Holy Week and the current state of political discourse in this country, I consider that the darkness which surrounds us is very dark indeed. Those of us who are of a certain age, might find cause to think of the words of the pop song "For what it is worth" by the group Buffalo Springfield-

*Paranoia, it strikes deep
Into your life it will creep
It starts when you are always afraid...*

In the midst of this darkness, we gather to celebrate this great feast of Easter.

It is on this day when we celebrate that we live not in a Good Friday world, but in a Resurrection World. The enormity of this transition is too great for most of us get our mind around, so we consider this in the micro scale described in the Gospel passage in the experience of one person.

From the scriptural record, and through our knowledge of the historical context, we can get a small glimpse into her life. She has had a roller coaster of life, with failed relationships along the way. She had access to some wealth (she was able to contribute to fledgling Jesus movement), but she had no social status. She lived in a cultural in which a woman's identity was bestowed upon her by her husband and her offspring. She had a difficult life and lived in world which was cruel to those who did not adhere to social norms.

Somewhere, in the course of her life, she met someone who restored her dignity.

She met someone who opened her eyes to the fact her identity was something which no outside person could give her and no one could take away. He enabled her stand up straight, gave her a spine, and gave her a voice again.

She then saw the same social forces which had always silenced her, silence him. She watched while indifferent officers of the law executed him in one of the most painful and degrading ways they could imagine.

The male disciples all fled after the arrest. They believed that unless they could demonstrate power and political sway, they were nothing. They were so terrified of their frailty being exposed that scattered like cock roaches exposed to the light.

It was Mary of Magdala, and the other women, who were continually aware of their weakness who had nothing to lose, who stuck around. In their compassion, they regained their dignity.

It was Mary who went to anoint the body who demonstrates the meaning of compassion at a time when we are clearly no longer in control.

It was in the tomb where she encountered the Risen Lord.

It was in the tomb where she first saw that we no longer live in a Good Friday world. She was given the courage to raise in her voice in a world which has commanded her to be silent and to shout out "I have seen the Lord!"

Although we celebrate the fact that today our tongues have been loosened, we often live our lives as if we are still in a Good Friday World.

I was recently sifting through some ancient articles in the New Yorker magazine, and stumbled upon an article written in 1959 about several Japanese soldiers in the Philippines who had remained there for 14 years after war's end- under the impression that war still being fought. It was not until representatives of the Japanese government informed them that they accepted the fact that the world

was a radically different place. The skill set which they relied upon for the past 18 years was no longer useful. The people who had once been their hated enemy, were now their friends. The vocabulary they used to describe their life in the world is now very different. Like Isaiah, 2500 years earlier, they heard the message

*I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.*

Very often we, like those poor soldiers, live in a Good Friday world and use the vocabulary of a Good Friday world.

May we have the joy and the courage to live out our lives as a Resurrection People!

Alleluia, Christ is Risen!