

I have good memories of *Easter*, growing up as a child. *Christmas* was still the best, but we did rise on *Easter* morning to find *Easter baskets* prepared—mysteriously when we were very young—and not so mysteriously when we were older. But we still loved the assortment of *candies and little toys* that could fit in the basket with the brightly colored “grass”. There was always a *chocolate Easter bunny*. And there might also be *new Sunday clothes* to wear to church. Often we had already *dyed and decorated Easter eggs* at home and would have an Easter egg *hunt* at church and then later at home too. I cannot remember how much I was able to make of the association between all *that* and... *Jesus...and God*. But church was a big part of that day and I came to know of the strange stories of Jesus’ terrible death--and then his coming alive again. I came to learn the familiar Easter hymns. And if we were fortunate, we had our Easter Day...on an *uncloudy* day...in which to enjoy the beautiful and energizing emergence of *spring*, in the *light*. | Does any of this sound familiar? Do families still do many of these things?

But, of course, I *don’t* get an Easter basket anymore, or chocolate bunnies...I don’t dye Easter eggs anymore...and I don’t wear new Sunday Easter clothes. I imagine the time will come when I may get to do some of these things again with our granddaughter Ruthie. And it is of course a joy to witness our children here have an Easter egg hunt after church, like old times. And, as much as I like fall and winter, I am still moved by the emergence of spring and the vast re-awakening of life all around us.

And, since I still tend to go to church...a lot :)...now *I think even more* about those strange stories of Jesus’ resurrection. Because for me, and no doubt for you, *death* has long been very real and very personal. And *life* can often look and feel a lot more like the cross...than the empty tomb. We are all way past our “Mr. Rogers” days when we used to imagine that the world was only full of people who lived like neighbors with each other, except perhaps when they were having a bad day. And if we were fortunate, we may have grown up having experienced *church* as a place where people really did try...to live like good neighbors--and that experience may have helped us to imagine that there was something about “Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood” that was actually possible.

But it’s tough being a *grown-up*. Well, it’s also tough being young-ish and *growing up*. Life is more complex—and messed up—than we could have ever imagined in the beginning. We find ourselves becoming prudent, cautious, skeptical, guarded, private, and...“realistic”...as part of our survival strategy...in a world that can look more like Good Friday than Easter Day. **But we have come here today for something different. Something has taught us to yearn for more than what the world gives...even if we aren’t quite sure if it can really be true.**

We have heard enough of the Easter stories of Jesus, and we have heard enough Easter music, that we may be able to remember that there is *a very different story that the Church has been given to tell*. It is such a wild, big story that the Church has never exhausted its proclamation of it. And all our attempts to understand it continue to encounter a mystery so unexpected and so deep that every generation is still seeking to understand it anew. And this mystery pulls at our skeptical-hopeful-hearts and invites us to wonder again.

Fortunately, we have a whole season to dive into Easter—a season of *fifty days* in which the Easter Paschal Candle here...will burn. But I know I won’t have a whole season with *all of you* after today, so let me say what I can say *today*.

The resurrection of Jesus...is many things...and an endless source of discovery. But one thing it is not...is a metaphor. It is not just another way of saying eternal life. The idea of the resurrection is not a crude attempt of ancient--and supposedly ignorant--people trying to metaphorically say...what we think we already know from religion—that there is life after death. And yes, religions do know that there is life after death. And near-death experiences and other experiences are more signs that there is more to life than the finalities of death. But the resurrection of Jesus says more than that.

The resurrection of Jesus *was an event in history and time*...as incredible as that seems. And the early Church's experience of the resurrection was *so compelling*...that the Church expected that history and time would very soon follow into *more resurrection and the end of history and time*. But of course, that did *not* happen—and there is an honest and candid pain and puzzlement that we can find in the New Testament about that. But something else *did* happen *fifty days after the resurrection*, on a day we call Pentecost, which means, yes: “the fiftieth day”. But that's a story for later.

Even though history and time inexplicably have continued on past Easter Day, the Church still speaks as if the resurrection of Jesus just happened *yesterday* and that all time has almost collapsed in between now and then. The Church also speaks as if the *final resurrection of all things* could happen...anytime. The resurrection of Jesus is like a large stone that dropped into the pond of the universe...and that keeps rippling in every direction...through *history and time*... and through *the spiritual world within and beyond history and time*.

The resurrection is so much more than we could have even imagined to ask for. But it is what we really *need*. Because it is what God really *wants*:

- **Resurrection announces the restoring and renewing of a fallen creation**—both heavenly *and* earthly. And, contrary to all appearances, God's will is not lose a single person; not a single ensouled animal, not anything of God's good creation.
- **Resurrection speaks God's endless word of peace**--as announced by Jesus risen from the dead. It is a word of peace given to the Church by Jesus to also announce and show...a word of *grace* to all beleaguered high-achievers and all have who have failed...a word of *mercy* to all the broken and overwhelmed...a word of *forgiveness* for all our sad offences and regret...and a word of *infinite life* to all the living and the dead. This word of peace ripples through the fabric of time and the heavenly places.
- And, **the resurrection also speaks a word of God's judgment**. It is not a volatile and vindictive judgment. It is worse than that: a judgment that is the utter clarity of divine love that looks us in the face; confronting all the crucifiers past and present; confronting all the accommodations of religion and politics to the evils of our day; confronting our dull absorption into ourselves; confronting our fondness for endless new forms of cruelty and distraction; and confronting the world's loss of heart for the “least of these” of which Jesus spoke: “*the tired, poor, huddled masses yearning to breathe free...the wretched refuse, homeless, and tempest-tossed*” (Emma Lazarus). There *is* an appropriate response of fear to the resurrection...*not because God is evil*...but because God is truly good when we are not. The resurrection of Jesus is a decisive “No” to all these *shadows* that linger on here, after Jesus' resurrection, and that keep insisting on their self-importance and inevitability, demanding that we be resigned...and forgetful of this Easter Day. *The risen Jesus calls anybody who will listen--whether in the Church or not—out of the shadows...and into the light of the resurrection...where everybody...literally every body...Jesus' body...our bodies...the body of the world...matter to God.*

This one Day of Resurrection, in history and in time...of this One man Jesus...the Church has been given to proclaim...*as the definitive moment in the history of creation, both earthly and heavenly*. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead...from the tyranny of the powers and principalities of Good Friday...reveals the complete will of God...and anticipates more than we could have ever hoped or imagined with all our religions and philosophies.

Today we are embraced and confronted...by the mysterious and unsettling...joyous and fearful...risen Lord...who gives us *his word of Peace*...for all those who will receive it...for us to also give...to all who will receive it. He gives us *the tangible gift of himself*...in his Body and Blood...which we can barely understand either...to receive together...in reverence of God and each other. And this risen Jesus sends us forth again and again...to leave this place...and “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord”. |

If Easter baskets and chocolate bunnies, new Easter Sunday clothing and Easter family gatherings, help you find again God's resurrection vision...for you and the world, then...thank God! | And for anyone who has had to become worldly-wise...and weary...and can yet hear the distant music of the resurrection given in Jesus Christ...then may we find our hearts lifted up.