

Easter Day
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The Rev. Mark B. Pendleton
Christ Church, Exeter

The Essence of Easter

What is the essence of Easter? What is the impact of proclaiming: Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed!

It is easy to forget, but there is a reason that the Christian faith spread so quickly to many cultures and languages. This movement began with a son a carpenter and a motley crew of Galilean laborers. Its message included and touched anyone and everyone. Peter, one of the closest of Jesus' disciples, saw the work of the resurrection as shattering the many divisions that had existed. Paul did as well. The world got smaller but the work of spreading the Good News grew larger.

One of the great challenges of navigating today's polarized society -- where divisions and fear of the other is a constant threat -- is for us to continue to see our neighbor and the other not as a threat or an obstacle to our success or freedom but as a child of God. Peter, in the account from Acts 10, has a cross-cultural experience with Cornelius -- Roman -- clearly outside his orbit. He tells the large crowd this and then sums up the gospel: v. 34 "I truly understand that God shows no partiality." v. 36 He is Lord of all.

We've had to do a lot of sorting through the Parish Hall of over 50 years of stuff. We've been doing our best to cull, sort, donate and toss those items that did not make the cut. We had a room full of children's books and many pictures. They were clearly dated. We had decisions to make. On one hand we didn't want to just throw all of them out. But when we started looking through the books with pictures -- one thing became clear. The pictures of Jesus and of children learning about Jesus were of white faces. They looked like they were suburban children in the 60's and 70's learning about a Jesus who looked like he was from Sweden. That is not our world. So many of the picture books went -- donated and recycled. God shows no partiality and we know that the way in which we teach children to see the world will determine how they live in it.

The Empty Tomb is the prevailing image of this day.

If it's hard to wrap our minds around the resurrection -- how Jesus was raised after being nailed to a cross, emptiness is something we can all understand. Looking for something and not finding it. Searching for someone and not encountering them.

Emptiness is, in most cases, not something we think of as good and positive. We think of empty promises, empty stomachs of starving masses, empty houses waiting to be foreclosed. What is the most damning one can say about a prominent person who is ill prepared or incompetent for doing their job (in this case) -- they are an empty suit. We all know that most snack foods are empty calories. A whole demographic is considered empty nesters. Empty churches are usually not a good sign for the future. We don't want

to be empty of the Holy Spirit: we want to be full, overflowing, having God's grace in abundance.

The first Episcopal priest I ever knew was my chaplain at Florida State University. The late Bernie Dooly used to say "that problem with Easter is that we often see it from the wrong side: we're on the outside looking into the dank darkness of the empty tomb. We encounter absence before we experience presence."

Which I take to mean this: before we ask where is God when I need God, or where is God in the suffering of the world, we do the work of learning the sacred stories, praying, watching, and seeing how God is alive and present in all that we do. From the moment we get out of the bed to the last thought we have at night. We gather here around this altar each Sunday to take, bless, break and share the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist – to fill emptiness with presence.

Easter is saying to us: fill emptiness with things that last.

And some of what the world has to offer is not what will ever truly fill us. We can drink ordinary water and be thirsty again. When we drink deeply of what God offers – new life in Christ – our thirsty for love and meaning can be satisfied and multiplied.

The work we do as a community of believers – following a Risen Jesus -- is to remind ourselves what fills the emptiness. The list from Romans 12 is a good place to start and write down on the inside of our bland Easter card. Let love be genuine, hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good, love one another, rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, extend hospitality to strangers.

Live into the resurrection. We are not called to save the entire world. Jesus filled that role. Our work is to be a companion along the way to make sure we fill our corner of God's world with hope.

I love the blessing that we use on occasions as end our service. "Life is short and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel the way with us. So, be swift to love, make haste to be kind." (Henri Frederic Amiel)

What is the essence of Easter to you?