

Easter Day
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Easter Happiness, Love and Aliveness

Peter began to speak to Cornelius and the other Gentiles: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ--he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." Acts 10:34-43

We might be surprised to learn that the ancient creeds of the church, such as the Nicene Creed we say each Sunday, were essentially the work of committees -- people discussing, writing multiple drafts, and finally pulling together the essence of what it means to believe. It took 56 years to reach a final agreement in the case of what we affirm still to this day. 56 years! Consider that piece of historical trivia if you think your work on the condo board, town committee or church vestry is too long!

Many centuries later, another committee of sorts formed to find fresh words to express what it means to believe in Jesus Christ. They were missionaries working with the Maasai people in East Africa six decades ago. Listen to how they reflected the core of the Christian faith to resonate with the daily life of the local people.

We believe in the one High God, who out of love created the beautiful world and everything good in it.

He created man and wanted man to be happy in the world.

God loves the world and every nation and tribe on the earth.

We believe that God made good his promise by sending his son, Jesus Christ, a man in the flesh, a Jew by tribe, born poor in a little village, who left his home and was always on safari doing good, curing people by the power of God, teaching about God and man, showing that the meaning of religion is love.

He was rejected by his people, tortured, and nailed hands and feet to a cross, and died. He was buried in the grave, but the hyenas did not touch him, and on the third day, he rose from that grave. He ascended to the skies. He is the Lord.

We believe that all our sins are forgiven through him.

He is alive. He lives. This we believe.

These words echo what Peter was saying in those early days we read about in Acts: how Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day.

In Exeter New Hampshire there are of course no hyenas – though I did see a pack of very healthy coyotes romping in my backyard last month – and you and I can only dream of an exotic safari destination: those affirming words speak to me as powerfully as any others.

What I find more compelling about the fresh expression of faith in the Massai Creed are these three words: ‘happy’, ‘love’ and ‘alive.’

When and if I ever feel a bit blue and down, music has immediate effect in lifting me to a higher place. My ‘go-to’ song and video is Pharrell William’s “Happy” from ten years ago. As the expression goes: it never gets old. What made it a sensation was how people from around the world recorded videos of themselves dancing and singing and simply being happy and letting the world see and know about it.

Yes, I’m all into the word ‘joy’ that even found its way into our mission statement here at Christ: to live joyfully in faith. The best title of any memoir ever written in my view was C.S. Lewis’ ‘Surprised by Joy.’ We can also cite John 15:11 when Jesus said: “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” Happiness, we learn, is expressed on the outside and joy on the inside. And all of that may be true.

But what I connect with in this creed from East Africa is the desire to express and show this beautiful world that God created that the joy we can experience in our inner lives needs to find ways to be seen by others. Our world today can use more inner joy to break out.

Easter, I hope, reminds us that even though Christ died and was raised, we are still facing down expressions of darkness and evil. Horrendous and senseless school shootings in our nation too many to count, brutal and futile wars started by insecure autocrats, refugees on the move around the world because their homelands are no longer safe to live – those who like Jesus left home -- but their safari is filled with danger and never seems to end.

And what the Massai Creed reminds us of the heart of the matter: the meaning of religion is love. Imagine what the world be like if that simple truth was reenforced and lived out by the world’s largest religion: Christianity. That this love fundamental would and should ground our lives, help ease our many fears, organize our communities, shape our values, steady our

resolve to do what is right when no one is looking, infuse our political debates, and help us consider what it is to walk in the shoes of those who are too often discarded, overlooked, misunderstood, and scapegoated.

Happiness, love and one more: Alive. "He is alive. He lives. This we believe."

When the women arrived at the tomb that first Easter morning, two things could have happened. They were prepared to anoint Jesus' body for final burial and his movement would have probably ended right then and there. But that's not what happened. People in the ancient world were not expecting a resurrection to happen right then and there. They knew death all too well: it was all around them. Yet, what happened next began something new and eternal and there were many witnesses – the apostle Paul numbers them at more than 500 -- who saw and spoke of their encounters with the Risen Christ. Fast forward two thousand years, and we are those witnesses today. We experience the Risen Christ in the Eucharist we celebrate as those early Christians did. We see him in the peace that he alone can bring when we are overwhelmed by grief, loneliness, fear, and anxiety that can leave us paralyzed, not knowing if we can move into the future.

For you and me, this is our Easter work that lasts a lifetime: to continue the work that Jesus began and invite others to join us. To look into the eyes of death and despair and believe that that is not the final word. To affirm that religion should not co-opted and used to injure or harm or judge or label people, but to inspire us all to be more than we have been.

In this beautiful world God created, we are here, gathered again on this Easter Day.