

The New Life in Christ
The Rev. Amy Spagna
Easter Day – April 9, 2023
Matthew 28:1-10

He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said." (Matthew 28:6, NRSV)

What on earth is going on??

It is easy to imagine how frightening it must have been for Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, and the guards assigned to the tomb to be caught in the middle of an earthquake and then to see an actual angel standing in front of them. It was one more strange and scary event at the end of a week of strange and scary events. It's a wonder the Marys didn't totally lose their tempers and start yelling at the angel. *What do you mean, he isn't here? He's dead. We saw it happen. And we saw them put this big heavy stone right here, and assign a guard, just to make sure nobody would come by and steal the body. We only came this morning to finish anointing him because we couldn't do it the other day. And NOW, you're telling us he's not here?* Despite the angel's message, there isn't a ton of certainty about what this news might mean. They run to tell the rest of the disciples, bringing with them a mixture of fear and joy. It's then Jesus appears and greets them, as the angel promised. Just like that they know for certain: things are definitely not the same as they were just a few hours ago.

Along with the Marys, who made the initial discovery of the empty tomb, we've been through a lot in the past week. We've retraced Jesus' steps from his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, to that last Passover meal, to the garden at Gethsemane, through the narrow winding streets of Jerusalem, and finally up to the foot of the cross. We've walked alongside the ones who were brave enough to stay, and the ones who fled because they feared they might be next. Though it all, we've shared in their nearly

unspeakable grief at the state-sanctioned murder of their teacher and friend. Today, we get to share in their joy at going from the darkness and death of Good Friday into the light of new life. We also have the privilege of bringing a new person into the community as part of this celebration. We will invite him to join us in confessing the faith of Christ crucified, and to share with us in his eternal priesthood. This invitation is very similar to the one spoken by the angel: come and see – see what this new life is like.

At the most fundamental level, Christ's death and resurrection have changed our lives for ever. That change starts with how it counters directly the human tendency to engage in all manner of sinful behavior. It ends with the undoing of death as we know it. In between them stands the open invitation to come and see, to live our lives in the same pattern as he did. Whether we like it or not, we've been made a part of it by virtue of our baptisms. As St. Paul wrote to the Church at Rome a generation later, if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

This is our faith at the most basic level. God did this thing, in and through the person of Jesus Christ, and continues to invite us to participate in it. Period. Michael Ramsey, who served as Archbishop of Canterbury from 1961-1974, once cautioned that, "We are tempted to believe that, although the Resurrection may be the climax of the Gospel, there is yet a Gospel that stands upon its own feet and may be understood and appreciated before we pass on to the Resurrection. The first disciples did not find it so. For them the Gospel without the Resurrection was not merely a Gospel without its final chapter: it was not a Gospel at all. Jesus Christ had, it is true, taught and done great things: but He did not allow the disciples to rest in these things. He led them on to

paradox, perplexity and darkness; and there He left them. There too they would have remained, had He not been raised from death. But His Resurrection threw its own light backwards upon the death and ministry that went before; it illuminated the paradoxes and disclosed the unity of His words and deeds... The Gospel of God appears in Galilee: but in the end it is clear that Calvary and the Resurrection are its centre. For Jesus Christ came not only to preach a Gospel but to be a Gospel, and He is the Gospel of God in all that He did for the deliverance of [humankind]."¹

The implications of this devastatingly simple truth may not be entirely clear to all of us – at least, not yet. And that is fine. Over time, we've all learned, and hopefully internalized, a long list of beliefs and actions that stem from it. And we all respond to God's invitation to join the party in our own unique way. For Allen, being not quite sure about it is exactly where he is right now. He's only just begun to discover what this new life in Christ is about. His present reality is about to be colored by a wet forehead, some sweet-smelling oil, and in how his "village" has all of a sudden grown exponentially. Whether he feels any differently than he did before, he may or may not have the words to express. Regardless, he has the tangible thing of the promise that we will do everything in our power to support him as he grows to lean on. It's a big deal – for us, and for him. It's through us that Allen will come to know Jesus, and what it will mean for him to be a part of the Christian community. On this day, when we celebrate the gift of new life, there is no better present to receive than the privilege of becoming a part of it in this time, and for all time.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

¹ "A. Michael Ramsey on the Centrality of the Resurrection."
<https://creedorchaos.wordpress.com/2009/05/22/ramsey-resurrection/> [accessed April 6, 2023].