



Sunday, April 2, 2018

Good morning. Welcome happy morning age to age shall say. Welcome shining happy day. Easter Sunday. A sunny, lovely Easter Sunday. Rich with happy themes: Mary Magdalene comes to the garden; so this is a love story with a happy ending in the end. The tomb becomes a garden. That's why the gardener is there. That's a happy thing. And there are other positive themes. The tomb is empty and Jesus makes a number of appearances over the next few days.

I do want to be a little careful, though. The world is full of happy optimistic themes if that is what you are looking for. And why not? A lot of people say, for example, that the economy is really gearing up. Back to boom. 3 to 4 % growth on the way. Also, quite a few people are saying that we are basically coming back to the responsible exercise of power in our foreign policy. Afghanistan is doing OK, and we've put down the steel glove on Syria. There will be shocking events, various bombings, and situations. What should be done or not done about North Korea? but overall, the news is good. The Taliban and Isis are on the run in most places. And it's all just going to be at least OK in the end.

Lots of people look on the bright side, see the cup half full, and on the whole that's a good thing. It gives us some good tone. America is an optimistic land, where great things can happen. And do. Partly because we expect them to, and act accordingly.

Of course you have to ask yourself, how deeply insightful, realistic we are being? How long will it be until the economy is really booming along again? Not just plenty of jobs, but jobs that will pay a living wage. And the Middle East. How long have we been there now?

Still, I'm so ready for Easter. What a beautiful weekend for such a joyous feast. It is almost the final word and it is a very happy one. This is quite a way to bring the story to its end, or very close to its end. Jesus is risen and we know this will be a very happy story in the end.

Not that our own personal stories have been finally told. But at least most of Jesus' story has been. It's a done deal except for the pieces about ascension and then coming on the clouds, and we really aren't expecting that to happen any time soon. So what are our stories going to be like? How bad or good are they going to wind up being? Remember that just a couple of days ago, it seemed like Jesus' story was going to end badly. Very badly, with injustice, physical pain, and isolation from all his friends. Not good.

Now this is turned around from the inside out. Please notice it is turned around. It is not as though the bad things are ignored as though they never had been. It is not as though they were a mistake and now the real truth is coming out. Our faith does not avoid the bad things. On the contrary, it pays huge attention to human suffering, our own, and the suffering of the world.

You've got to watch out for some of the optimists. They have a tendency to run away from the bad things, not see them or ignore them. Christian people, on the other hand, need to pay attention to the wounds of the world, be compassionate, work effectively for peace and justice. Remember Thomas in one of the resurrection appearances, demands to see Jesus' wounds. The risen one did not avoid trouble. And as the Spring flowers bloom, let me remind us that we need to work for a much greener world, and maybe not so warm. How about those polar ice caps? Although the sun is so nice!

We Christian people are profoundly optimistic, but we are not superficially optimistic. It is at the bottom of Jesus experience of suffering and death that the great glorious, solemn power of resurrection first appears.

And then continues to grow from the depths, changing the sorrow of his loved ones to an equally deep joy, creating church from the scattered, broken band of brothers and sisters.

So, our faith is very realistic. We know what we are dealing with. Maybe that is why we are so profoundly optimistic and joyous in the end; because God has dealt with the worst that the world has to offer and turned it around from the very depths.

Jesus' story is pretty much complete. He is risen. Our stories, yours and mine, have a way to go; but if Jesus' story means what I'm pretty sure it means, there is no place we can go where God's wonderful, creative, resurrection power will not go also and be there for us.

So. It is time for joy, a deep and powerful joy which no sorrow can overcome, as we invite the truly wonderful reality of Easter to shape our life and work together.

Because he is risen. Alleluia.