

April 12, 2020

Easter Sunday

INTRODUCTION

Easter Sunday! A day for exclamation points! If there is any day you need to pull out all the stops (as the organists say), it is this day. This is the day that changed everything. Easter is the reason we worship on Sunday rather than Saturday, the first day of the week rather than the seventh day, the Sabbath day when the Lord rested. Because of this day, our worship life is reoriented toward the rising of the sun, rather than the setting.

Resurrection Day is a day of light and color, singing and laughter. It is a loud day and a day for running or at least moving with a lighter step. “Hold on there,” you’re thinking, “We don’t have the resources to hire an orchestra or to repaint the sanctuary, and it’s all we can do to keep the kids from running down the hallways, and now you want to bring that exuberance into the worship area?” Well, yes; yes, we do.

OK, it’s not about spending vast amounts of money making the worship experience like what you see on TV. But it is about the attitude you bring to worship. Exuberance is a good word, as is joy. Words that speak of the overflowing nature of the gift of grace that is this day of celebration, that’s what we’re seeking here. It’s not about the trappings, but about the heart. What can you do to bring a childlike lightness to the hearts of all those who worship with you today? What can you offer that will bring a smile, or better yet, a laugh-out-loud guffaw of pure joy?

The colors assigned to Easter are white and gold, perfect for the purity and the glory of Resurrection Sunday. But those aren’t the only colors allowed on this day. Color should splash and dazzle, like spring is breaking out everywhere. When the gold light of dawn rises, it enhances all the colors of creation, not just its own brightness. Let the lilies take the center, but surround them with spring flowers of every hue and height.

Let the room be full of the voices of children. If children usually are elsewhere during worship – Sunday school or Children’s church – bring them into the sanctuary for this service. Let them sit and wiggle and move and bring light and

life to the whole proceedings. Have a children's time, call it a "Peter and John Race," and have them run from the back of the sanctuary to the Communion Table. Let whoever wins look in as if into a tomb; let the second-place winner run up and sit in the preacher's chair or join the choir. Let whoever doesn't want to run declare to the congregation, "Do not be afraid! I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified."

The scripture should not be read today. Wait, not *just* read. It should be proclaimed; it should be sung; it should be shouted. Find the ones who have drama in their souls and let them read the text today. And then hang on every word.

It's Easter – the day of light and laughter, the day that defines us. Every Sunday is a little Easter, so let this Easter Sunday be the day that sets the tone for the rest of the year and the rest of your life as the people of God.

PREACHING NOTES

There is a tradition in the Orthodox Church that says the preachers don't preach on Easter. Rather, they stand in the pulpit and tell jokes. It's a day for laughing at death. "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15: 55-57). Easter is a day for laughing at the enemy. It is a day to embrace the joy of Resurrection. How, dear preacher, are you going help your people do that? Of course, some are grieving, even today. Some are too familiar with suffering to have a light heart. So, this isn't a time to try out your stand-up routine. And yet, laughter, or certainly lightness of heart, has a place in the pulpit today. Lean into the joy of this day.

We have a choice in our Gospel text on Easter Sunday. The lectionary defaults to John for this Sunday, but it is also Year A, which is Matthew's year. So, make your pick from the one that makes your heart leap. Is it John, and the race of the century and Mary weeping in the garden, mistaking Jesus for the maintenance crew? Or is it Matthew and the only mention of the earthquake and the guards falling over like bowling pins and the angel looking like a Las Vegas performer with shining clothes and flashing lights and then relaxing on the rock? Matthew and the women seized with fear and great joy – how can one body contain all that

diversity of emotion? And then Jesus popped in with a “howdy” and a mission, while they clung to his feet like toddlers greeting daddy home from work. But stop there for today. Don’t keep reading; don’t get to the mountainside, where they worshiped, and some doubted. Save that for another day. Let joy have the day, even a joy that resides next to fear. This is an unsettling day, when the certainties by which we had lived our lives are turned on their heads. When death we knew as final is only a momentary thing, only a passage from the life we know to the life we long for. That’s disturbing, even while it is exciting. Because if this is true, this eternity thing, if death is not what we thought it was, then who can say what else that we have chosen to live our lives by might also turn out to be a lie that we’ve accepted as truth: concepts such as “might makes right”; or “wealth is the greatest blessing”; or “it’s every person for himself/herself in this rat-race of a world.”

The epistle lesson poses a similar question: “What else is true or not true in our lives as we have chosen to live them?” Colossians 3:1-4 is a snippet of a longer argument, but maybe it’s all we need on Easter Sunday—a proclamation, not a debate. It does, however, start with an “if” statement. “If we’re going to swallow this Easter thing, and if we’re going to go with the idea that it isn’t just about Jesus but somehow about us as well, and if we have been raised with Christ, then do what Christ says.” Remember the Gospel proclamation, “He is not here!”

“Seek the things that are above, where Christ is” (Col. 3:1).

Now, that doesn’t mean that we become “so heavenly minded that we’re no earthly good,” as the saying goes. But we raise our thinking to higher things like justice and truth, service and sacrifice, and love. Remember Maundy Thursday and the new commandment. Those are the things we are to set our minds on. Perhaps the preacher could make a list of the things we ought to leave behind (self-centeredness, revenge, grudges, hatred), so that we can set our minds on the things above. If you need help with that list, read on a few more verses; get down to verse 12: “Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.” That’s a good start for this Easter day.

Other readings assigned to this day, [Jeremiah 31:1-6](#) and [Acts 10:34-43](#), are about the results of the Easter event. They speak of the kin-dom to be, the peace that

shall reign. Jeremiah speaks of planting and enjoying the fruit of their labors, free from the invader who will come and steal and burn. Acts talks about tearing down barriers between people, us and them, and living as one community in mutual love and respect, the true meaning of the word kin-dom. These have begun, but await fulfillment in completeness.

The Psalm, [118:1-2, 14-24](#), centers around the steadfast love of the Lord. It is that love, that steadfast love, that defines us in this post-Easter reality. God is with us, and we rejoice in that presence. Even when we have suffered, we can learn from that, we can grow from that and embrace the deeper presence that comes as we grow. It is an invitation to live into something more, something higher and deeper. And it carries the hope of heaven in the midst: "I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord" (v.17). This can only be accompanied by a song like "O Happy Day." To recount the deeds of the Lord is to remember our salvation. It is to live in hope.

*"He taught me how to watch, fight and pray, fight and pray / And
live rejoicing every, everyday!"*

Easter is a day for joy. For light and love and laughter.