

The Reverend Renee L. Fenner
St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
2nd Sunday of Easter/Year B
April 8, 2018
Text: John 20: 19-31

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

I love this ancient prayer that we get to shout during Eastertide! Don't you? It is hard to believe a week has passed when we finally took our Alleluias and bells out of storage and made a joyful noise signaling something wonderful to celebrate.

In her sermon, "The Unnatural Truth", theologian and preaching woman extraordinaire, Barbara Brown Taylor, began an Easter sermon by telling her listeners that "*Easter always falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon on or after the spring equinox. As complicated as that sounds, it makes ancient sense, since it means Easter coincides with the greening of the earth. Christ is risen and the whole world comes to life. Sap rises in dormant trees, spring peepers start their peeping, and trumpet lilies spill their sweet smell on the air. The connection is a happy one, guaranteed to renew our faith in the creative power of God.*

But it is also a misleading one, because spring is entirely natural. Buy a daffodil bulb in the winter and it looks like nothing in your hands-a small one, maybe, with its skin and scraggly roots. If you have had any experience with bulbs, however, that does not worry you. You know all you have to do is wait. Come springtime it will escape the earth and explode with color, a yellow butterfly of a blossom shedding its cocoon. As miraculous as it is, it completely natural.

She then goes on to write, "*Resurrection on the other hand, is entirely unnatural. When a human being goes into the ground, that is that. You do not wait around for the person to reappear so you can pick up where you left off-not this side of the grave, anyway. You say good-bye. You pay your respects and you go on with your life as best you can, knowing that the only place springtime happens in a cemetery is on the graves, not in them.*"

Yes, this is what those of us who have experienced loss know all too well. That is what the disciples grappled with on that first Easter morning. As far as they knew, their Teacher was dead. They were not exactly shouting *Alleluia* or picking daffodils for that matter either. In fact, it was quite the opposite.

On Easter Sunday we heard Mark's account of the Easter story and of the three women who made their way to the tomb to properly tend to Jesus' body. When they got there, the stone had been rolled away and the body of Jesus was gone. Though they were given a message to share with the other disciples, they ran away in fear and said nothing to anyone. In the alternate reading from John's gospel, it was Mary Magdalene who went alone to the tomb. When she saw that the stone was rolled away, she ran to tell Peter and the other disciple, "*the one Jesus loved,*" what she saw. Together they ran to the tomb and saw what Mary reported and that the tomb was empty except for the discarded linens. But even they returned home in silence not knowing what to believe. A little later Mary encountered the risen Jesus who she first thought was the gardener. Mary went back bursting with the news, "I have seen the Lord!" and still the disciples did not believe. So we come to today's gospel reading and there is no joy as we heard how the disciples were huddled together behind lock doors in fear, fear that is so counter to the awesome news of resurrection.

That evening Jesus came to where the disciples were hid and stood among them. "Peace be with you" he said to them. And he breathed into them the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who first breathed life into creation. In John's gospel, this, this was the moment of Pentecost. This was indeed, a new creation, a new beginning for the followers of the risen Christ. And it would be, a week later, a new beginning for Thomas who uttered the truth of what the writer of John's Gospel wanted us and all generations to know about the identity of Jesus. For when Thomas saw Jesus he uttered the words: "My Lord and my God!" Yes, Jesus was the Word John spoke of at the very beginning of Fourth Gospel; "the Word was with God and Word was God."

We might try to convince ourselves that if we had been there we would have understood it all from the very beginning. That the reason for their silence, their fear, and their lack of joy was because they hadn't figured it all out. But if we are honest, wouldn't we have been as fearful trying to figure it out in our minds too? Do we really recognize that much better than Mary, the other women, Peter, and the other disciples that resurrection happened? Wouldn't we have demanded like Thomas, the same experience of Jesus' presence? One week after Easter, are our lives any different? Are we living into the joy of resurrection or are we living behind locked doors?

Jesus knew our hearts all too well for he knew that there would be those who believed and those who would struggle with believing. He looked beyond time and the pages that would be written about him and said, "*Blessed are those who*

have not seen and yet have come to believe.” And apparently so did the writer of the Fourth Gospel who interjected the final words of this chapter: *“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that YOU may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”*

There are many who still find the resurrection something that raises as many question as it answers. There are some who still have difficulty seeing Jesus, even when he is right in front of us. When we look into the faces of a brother or sister, a child, a stranger, in the Bread, and in the Wine. There are many who still lock themselves into rooms out of fear and understandably so. There is a lot to be fearful of these days. And there are often times when we look for joy and peace and understanding everywhere but in God.

But thanks be to God, Jesus continues to show up again and again in our daily lives. He says to us as he said to Thomas, “Do not doubt but believe.” In other words, “do not be unbelieving but believe.” “I am with you.”

“Jesus is always entering the locked places of our lives. He comes eastering in us. Unexpected, uninvited, and sometimes even unwanted he steps into our closed lives, closed hearts, closed minds. Standing among us he offers peace and breathes new life into us. He doesn’t open the door for us but he gives us all we need so that we might open our doors to a new life, a new creation, a new way of being.”**

Believing this we can find joy and reason to shout, “Alleluia!” not only during Eastertide but in every tomorrow.

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

**“The Unnatural Truth”*, a sermon for Easter Sunday, by Barbara Brown Taylor in Home by Another Way, pages 109-110.

***“Unlocking Doors”*, an Easter sermon by the Rev. Michael K. Marsh.