

April 4, 2021 (Focus: Mark 16:1-8; Easter Sunday) *He is Going Ahead*

What is the resurrection? We enter dangerous territory of heart and soul if we try to explain it too much, but there is at least one thing important to say: resurrection is not resuscitation; it is transformation. Resurrection is not about God bringing God's finger down to the chest of Jesus and performing some sort of divine cardiac defibrillation and CPR on him. Jesus is not resuscitated, but is transformed in that tomb, and as usual with divine transformations, a name change comes; he is now the Christ.

As one often does in spring, I've been on the look out for my first butterfly sighting of the season; mention in media to keep an eye out for pollinators (don't clear brush too soon); one of the kids at yesterday's Easter egg hunt wearing butterfly hair clips.

The butterfly gives us a glimpse in nature of this idea of transformation. Larva to cocoon to butterfly; caterpillar to chrysalis to butterfly; one form to another, literally trans-formed.

If resurrection only about resuscitation, then why go through it all; as if suffering, wounds, mocking, beating, crucifixion meant nothing

Holy Saturday: what was, is no longer...what will be, is not yet

We may feel that even though Easter is technically here, don't fully feel it yet, for good reason...we will truly start to feel it more and more as we start gathering with friends, when can do "normal" activities, etc.; it will be a slow unfolding of transformation, it will take a while to shed these cocoons we are in.

Now we have to be careful with this metaphor of the butterfly for resurrection, as with any metaphor, it has its limits. This transformation from caterpillar to chrysalis to butterfly is natural, it requires nothing from the animal except to be; the caterpillar does not decide whether to remain a caterpillar or metamorphosize into a butterfly.

Jesus however made the choice—he choose to stay true to his message even when he saw it ruffled feathers, even when it put him in harms' way.

Pilate/Romans/Religious leaders who called for Jesus' death: unwittingly their choices abetted this transformation; they could not stop the power of good to eventually win

As for us, we can choose to resist transformation. We choose to resist transformation when we won't do the work of forgiveness, when we hold onto resentments and judgment and self-pity, and it causes us trouble. We see what trouble resisting transformation causes for those who choose to cling to the old ways of racism, sexism, homophobia, non-acceptance, xenophobia, demonizing the "other." Those who deny full humanity of others, which includes the God-light instilled in each of us, stay stuck in the old ways. In denying the other of their full humanity, they lock themselves in one state of being; they cannot transform, and so are locked in fear, hatred, self-pity, and misery.

Today is 53rd anniversary of the killing of MLK Jr. The night before he was killed, Rev. Dr. King preached a sermon at a church in Memphis. In that sermon he talked about how if God were to give him the choice of when he was to have lived, he would still choose to live in the time and place he was living in, even with the intense racism that kept people of color from voting or having decent wages or being treated equitably by the police or being treated like a human being, like a child of God by others. He said he still would have chosen to live in that time, because it was time in which "we have been forced to a point where we're going to have to grapple with the problems that men have been trying to grapple with through history, but the demands didn't force them to do it. Survival demands that we grapple with them" now, he said. In other words, it was a time rich with the possibility of transformation. King said he was happy that God allowed him to live in that period, to see what was unfolding, and be a part of the transformation. And he was happy to see others joining in the fight. As he said, "I'm delighted to see each of you here tonight in spite of a storm warning. You reveal that you are determined to go on anyhow. Something is happening in Memphis, something is happening in our world."

He further went on to say, "Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live – a

long life; longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will."

He just wanted to do God's will. He wanted to go on ahead to where Jesus was, where Jesus led, and do he called us to do, to love one another as we are loved.

It wasn't the first or most notable time King talked about the transformation possible in our world. Not quite five years before, in August 1963, he gave another quite notable speech, where he talked about the sort of transformation he dreamed about.

"I have a dream," Rev. King said, "that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood..."

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character...

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day."

The man the women encountered at the tomb told them that Christ went on ahead of them. To King and those who joined him in his work on civil rights and equity for all people, Christ went on ahead, to the polling places in the south where people of color went to try to exercise their right to vote, to the lunch counters where they just wanted a meal, to the homes where they just wanted peace and not a cross burning or a lynching. Christ went on ahead, to that bridge in Selma, on the buses with the freedom riders. Christ went on ahead, and sat in that room with President Johnson and others, trying to open hearts and minds. Just like today, when Christ goes on ahead, to the places where people have to

continue to protect the rights being taken away from people of color. Christ goes on ahead, to affirm those discriminated against because of who they love or how they identify. Christ goes on ahead, even to the church to remind them that all are welcome at the table, that all are welcome to sit and learn from Jesus and walk with Christ and be blessed.

The man in the tomb told the women that Jesus was not there in the tomb. He said “go, tell his disciples that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.” The living Christ goes before us, invites us to follow, for the dream is yet being fulfilled. We can choose to follow, we can choose to be part of the transformative power of God’s love made known to us in Jesus Christ, in the living Christ made known in and among us all. We can choose to be part of the unfolding dream that is the kingdom of God.

Let us turn our hearts and souls again to God in prayer. The tomb is empty, Christ goes before us. Before us are also all the mystery and wonder, the questions and the joy of this blessed day. We may not be able to explain it all, but we feel it, the hope of possibilities, the dreams, the spiritual fullness of rebirth in Christ we experience this morn. The earth itself echoes the newness of the dawning of Easter, with the hints of new growth, of new life spring forth from the ground and among all creation. Help us to take a moment (or more) to breathe in the new life, to bask in the glow of the renewed spirit flowing among us. Yes, there are dishes to clean and bills to pay and the other realities of our current times, but for a moment help us to be mindful that the spirit of the Risen Lord is with us, blessing us, offering us new life in God's love and grace.

There are so many among us, in our community, and in the world in need of your healing compassion and care – grant all in need an experience of your renewing touch, especially...

Silent prayer/meditation

Gracious and loving God, mysterious and wondrous and holy, bless us today and in the days ahead. Help us to proclaim in word and deed that we walk with the living Christ. Help us to shout out our Alleluias as we rejoice in the good news you offer us and all creation. In your holy name we pray. Amen.