

Easter morning ends our mourning

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Emmanuel Episcopal Church, West Roxbury, Massachusetts, on the Day of Resurrection, Easter Sunday, April 16, 2017.

When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. John 20:14

For this moment, let's place ourselves in the midst of this great drama as eyewitnesses of this most incredible story. It begins with a case of mistaken identity. What Mary Magdalene finds on that first Easter morning is certainly not what she expected. She and the other disciples are in deep mourning for the loss of their friend in whom they had placed all their hopes and expectations. Jesus had a profound effect on them. Now that he is gone, Mary can barely summon the courage to go to the tomb to anoint his body with spices. Imagine her surprise as she arrives to discover that not only has the stone been removed, but the body of Jesus is gone. All that remains are the linen wrappings in which his body was wrapped.

The sight of the empty tomb is a cause for both bewilderment and annoyance. It was not uncommon in those days for grave robbers to invade fresh tombs to plunder what might be there for the taking. Wondering where they had taken the body of Jesus, Mary runs to tell the others. The men, unable to believe what she is telling them, break into a run and head toward the tomb to see for themselves. They are astonished beyond words as they arrive breathlessly at the entrance to the tomb. The missing body of their friend is more than they can bear. Was this some kind of sick joke? The men go to break the news to others while Mary, still in deep mourning, remains alone at the entrance of the tomb.

The risen Christ is standing nearby but she doesn't see him because she is looking in the wrong direction. She is peering into the tomb that represents death and the end of all hope. She is thinking only of death and not of the possibilities of life. When she turns around she thinks the man standing there must be the gardener. It isn't until he speaks her name that Mary finds herself face to face with the risen Christ. This is no mistaken identity. Imagine how startled and shocked she is to recognize Jesus no longer lying dead in the tomb, but standing before her as big as life! Mary does not try to analyze what happened. She does not try to come up with an explanation. She has but one emotion now. She is overjoyed at the wonderful realization that Jesus is not dead, but very much alive. All she wants to do is to share this good news with everyone she can find.

As Mary's sorrow is turned into joy, the events of that Easter morning banish all the sadness and mourning of the trial and crucifixion. Crying and weeping are replaced with laughter and Easter joy. In the same way, our sorrow is turned into gladness and joy when we are released from the power of sin and death to the new life in Christ.

We can become so consumed with the emotions of sorrow and grief, so distracted by guilt, anger, and resentment that we can't feel anything else. We can become so discouraged with what we think is impossible that we simply can't see any possibilities for hope. We can be so distracted by disappointment and failure that we fail to see how it all might be redeemed. When discouraged or sorrowful, we often look in the wrong direction, because we are paralyzed with regret and remorse. Resurrection power enables us to focus on the possibilities of gaining insight into new possibilities that turn failure and defeat into victory. The accounts of the resurrection about the risen Christ tell us what happens to the disciples who had abandoned him at a time when he needed them most. They are now the most astonished people we can imagine.

Discover how the reality of the risen Christ works in you. Easter becomes our story when we experience the power of God's love overcoming falsehood, evil and death. Easter is our story when we are lifted up from the forces of oppression and depression. When you read and hear how people have turned failure into success, you can sense the greater power working in them. How much more we can do than we thought possible when we allow resurrection power to work in us.

I can't tell you that I have ever seen the risen Christ walking down the street. But, I can tell you that the power of resurrection is real in those whose lives have gone from rejection and dejection to regeneration. It is real in a child who drove her parents to distraction when she was failing in school until her life was turned around with the help of a therapist and for the first time she began making sense out of a life that was so chaotic.

The risen Christ is alive in an alcoholic husband whose wife and family had all but given up on him until he hit rock

bottom and gained sobriety. He began to put his life back together again with renewed hope. For the first time he was able to face life with a better attitude. People could see how he held his head up high with a positive expression.

The risen Christ is alive in an elderly person who became preoccupied with growing old and closer to death until she found someone else who felt the same way and began encouraging her. That in turn made her feel useful and gave her reason to want to live again.

The release of God's resurrection power gives us the will to live as a new creation. Praise God for the power of the resurrection working in those who believe it can happen! Easter morning ends our mourning. That is why we proclaim that Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed!