

Rector's Report

But ask the animals, and they will teach you, the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you, and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In God's hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being. Job 12:7-10

Dear Friends,

Most of you are aware that a couple of Easters ago, the northeast side of the sanctuary (formerly the old organ and choir area) transitioned into being a Marian Chapel. The theme of the chapel focuses on human connection to Creation and our call to participate the New Creation and New Community initiated through Christ's resurrection. The images and statues in the Marian Chapel have been draped in lace and net crepe for the season of Lent and will be unveiled again during the Great Vigil of Easter on the evening of April 4th.

Just as the followers of Christ initially believed that their movement was over with the crucifixion of Jesus such that they sought refuge in the upper room just south of the city walls, so too may we be tempted to sequester ourselves in light of so much that is challenging to the wellbeing of our nation and our world. Climate change, economic disparities, corruption in political leadership, persecution of immigrant and marginalized communities, and the wearing away of hard-fought women's rights and voter protections are all contributing to an understandable social malaise of the moment. Questions are posed, "Is the American experiment in democracy dying or dead?" and "Is the Episcopal Church dying or dead?" and "Are the planet ecosystems beyond the point of no return?"

When I hear these types of questions, my first response is, "I'm standing right here."

"What? What do you mean?" I am asked in turn.

"I mean that I'm standing right here in front of you, and I'm very much alive. I am a representative of the commitment to American Democracy. I am an Episcopal Priest leading in the midst of a vital congregation. I am a living being of this planet dedicated to it's continuing cultivation and care. So, the answer to all these questions is, "No, not on my watch!"

As followers of Christ, we are a resurrection people. We have chosen and are called to choose anew every day to pick up the work of renewal of God's earth and God's people that was begun through the ministry of Jesus and manifested through the courage of the early church. Early Christian martyrs were assaulted by public stoning, torn asunder by wild animals in the Roman arena, and burned at the stake for the ideals of compassion and reform. Imperialism throughout the ages has never taken kindly to a liberated God who liberates the people, to social movements for equality and justice for all people. What we are experiencing in our day is not new, It's just repackaged oppression for a different time and place. Nonetheless, Jesus calls us to resurrection as an ongoing force of Sacred work across time and place. Love is restless for God's grace in every generation and nation.

As the 16th century mystic St. Teresea of Avila has written,

*Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

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Throughout the journey of Holy Week from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday, we have the opportunity to participate in some of the most profound services of our faith tradition – services that remind us of how we are to live into Christ’s call towards justice, healing, and love and how deeply transformative the journey can be for our own lives and for the world. The stories of our faith are not always comforting, but they are real and speak to the deeper truths of human existence. Holy Week reminds us that fear and danger, corruption and death have never had the last word.

Never.

The challenge of the current generation is the same as when Jesus first gathered a community of followers committed to countermanding the violent forces of empire through the superior force of love to transform alienation into belonging, brokenness into wholeness, and disrupt cycles of abuse by those in authority. The services of Holy Week reinforce that true power resides in healing our connection with one another, with all Creation, and with God. We are each of us called to the healing work of Christ, the wounded healer, whose pierced hands and feet and side constitute a foundational aspect of his identity as the Messiah. Our Savior was as impacted by the violence of authoritarianism, injustice, and greed as we are. He refused to participate in a system that kept people unwell, unfed, and unseen. The wounds on his resurrected body show both the cost of confronting social unwellness and the promise of new life for those willing to continue the journey that he began on our behalf.

From the women and men who followed Jesus across the lands of First Century Palestine to the spread of Christianity around the world, those who committed their lives as a balm to the wounds of others and who gathered the diversity of the human family without partiality, are the intergenerational movement that is The Body of Christ in its authentic expression. In every generation there have been those who have attempted to use Christianity to justify the very injustices and violence that Christ challenged. That does not mean that Christ’s teachings are wrong, only that how theology and Christology was manipulated to satisfy the hungers of rulers and self-interested leadership was wrong. The history of the founding of America is deeply rooted in an authoritarian version of Christianity that is yet shaping our politics and public policy today. The wounds that Jesus suffered are still being inflicted on the Body of Christ, which is WHY we must turn towards the work of renewal – renewal in American identity and social practice as well as renewal within Christianity – and perhaps in all the Abrahamic faiths. For, any faith that justifies violence towards or oppression of others is really no faith at all but a propaganda of corrupt regime.

Holy Week turns our attention to truly take a hard look the realities of our age, to see the cost in terms of people and lands, to acknowledge injustices, to recognize the vital importance of working for change even when change seems implausible, to bring the light of hope and joy of community to a world mired in darkness, to move beyond a condition of fear to bring the Good News of the transformative power of love, and to cultivate relationships of healing in this amazing Creation that is Christ’s Garden of Resurrection.

With the concluding celebration of the Great Vigil of Easter and Easter Day services, we are dismissed into the world “Now send us forth a people, forgiven, healed, renewed; that we may proclaim your love to the world and continue in the risen life of Christ our Savior”.

This is our heritage, our faith, our pledge, our duty as citizens of heaven – to make God’s love known and real for all people, as those who follow not the death-dealing beliefs of those who would imprison Jesus for their own gain, but rather as those who joyfully pursue the free and freeing resurrected Christ across a living landscape of infinite possibility and promise within the New Creation that God would have us make for one another.

In Christ’s Peace,
Pastor Rachel+
The Rev. Rachel Taber-Hamilton, Rector

Associate's Report

As I write this Chimes message, I do so knowing that Holy Week is upon us and we will carry the message and inspirations from that week with us the rest of the year and will hopefully be refreshed and encouraged by what we will have experienced. Holy Week is a time of reflection and an evaluation of ourselves and the life we have chosen to make. And make no mistake about it, the life you are living is the one you have made by your life decisions, your attitudes and the manner in which you conduct yourself in this world. We are given choices and the choices we take determine who we are and the life we will live.

“Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies it yields a rich harvest.” These words of Jesus define the paschal mystery, the meaning of Jesus’ suffering, death, resurrection, ascension and what this means for us. In order to come to a fuller life and spirit, we must constantly be letting go of present life and spirit – of old ways and thoughts and patterns. We must be able to look objectively at ourselves and our long-held attitudes and beliefs because they might have become an anchor that keep us from being able to navigate this river of life we are in. Setting them aside so something new can be reborn in us. It is the ending of old ideas, opinions, ingrained attitudes and undiagnosed biases so that something new can take root in us and our spiritual soul can be re-nourished and re-invigorated.

This is what the paschal mystery is all about. It is not just a story we emphasize one week each year, referring to it periodically during the months but rather an on-going reality, if we will embrace it. The paschal mystery is a process of transformation with which we are given both new life and new spirit. It begins by letting go (the death) of something we once clung to, moves on to that which might be new to us, grieving the old (or not), adjusting to the new perspective, and finally accepting the new and being transformed into a new spirit awareness. This is what Jesus was trying to tell us to by his life, his teachings, his death and his resurrection.

This was his gift to us. The awareness to be able to look at ourselves in the mirror and see who we really are and then to choose the better angels inside each of us. It is a process and we are all capable of choosing the high road, the one less traveled but traveled, nevertheless. Let us approach the rest of the year dedicated to that which will make us, our community, and our world, a better place because we are in it and we are all children of God.

Thanks Be to God, Amen

Fr Allen