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St. James', Mt. Airy
3/27/16

Easter Day
Isaiah 65:17-25
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
Acts 10:34-43
John 20:1-18

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

There is a practice in the Orthodox tradition to tell jokes at Easter in honor of the joke that Jesus played on death in the resurrection.

Don't stop me if you've heard this one before.

It happened in Sunday School. It's always Sunday School, isn't it? You see, Ms. Clara had been out of town visiting her new grandbaby and didn't have time to prepare the normal lesson, and so instead she decided to put out art supplies of every type imaginable and invite the kids to enjoy some unstructured creative time.

As she walked around the room to see what each kid was creating she saw that Colin was drawing a robot. She moved on to see Kayla was making paper airplanes. And then she came to Hannah.

Hannah was a child who had a hard time staying focused. But there she was, sitting still, with 110% of her attention focused on the picture she was drawing. Ms. Clara looked at it, not entirely sure what it was.

She said, “Hannah, I really love the effort you are putting into your picture. Can you tell me it?”

Without looking up Hannah replied, “It’s a picture of God.”

Ms. Clara was a bit surprised, but then she said, “That’s big work. After all, no one knows what God looks like.”

Hannah didn’t miss a beat, saying, “They will in a minute.”

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Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.¹

Mary, and the other disciples, knew the face of God in Jesus. And yet that did not help in those bewildering hours and days after the crucifixion when all hope seemed to be lost.

And so it was that Mary went to the tomb while it was still dark. We are not told why she made the trip. Perhaps she simply wanted to be near her Lord. Whatever drew her there, she paid attention to the impulse.

The first thing Mary saw was that the stone had been removed. Later, after the foot race between Peter and the beloved disciple, Mary saw two angels in white. Then she saw a man.

¹ Mary Oliver, “Sometimes – 4”.

We are told it was Jesus, but that she did not know it was him.

How could this be? How could she see a face so dear, and not recognize him? Was her grief clouding her vision? Was it beyond comprehension to believe she was once again standing face to face with Jesus?

Perhaps. Or maybe *how* this story is told is simply this Gospel writer's way to teach us once again *who* and *whose* we are, and how we are to live after the resurrection.

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Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.

Elsewhere in John's Gospel we are given the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, and hear such verses as, "*The sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out,*" and "*I know my own, and my own know me.*"

And here we find the resolution to the suspense in this resurrection moment, with Jesus calling Mary by name.

Upon hearing him speak her name she immediately recognized him and turned to face him. There are no words to capture her astonishment.

I can only wonder at the power of looking into the eyes of God in that moment, knowing that you are fully known, even in the midst of so much that was then, and remains, unknowable.

Because resurrection is rather unknowable, isn't it? Except when it's not.

It's unknowable when we contemplate the magical thinking of a dead man walking around, and talking, and touching, and eating with his friends.

But it **is** knowable when we remember that we, like Mary, are known by name.

We are named at our baptism when we join the family of families around the world we call the church – but even before that, from the time we are born in the image of God, we are fully known.

The season of Lent was a time to strip down our lives to the essentials, and at Easter we recognize the deep truth that nothing separates us from the love of God – not even death. It is our yearly reminder of *whose* we are.

But not only that – it is the beginning of a season of commissioning us as followers of Christ that culminates with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. And what is our commission?

The last commandment Jesus gave to his friends as they shared a last meal, and as he tenderly washed their feet, was to love one another as he loved them. This is our commission too – as we put it in the Baptismal Covenant, *to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves.*

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Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord.”

We live the commandment Jesus gave us by telling people about the love of God, in our words and actions. By telling and showing **them** *who* and *whose* they are as well.

This is not about converting people.

It is about taking the bold and vulnerable step in these divisive times of ours to tell ourselves, that even in our differences, we will make the choice to see the light of God in every person we meet and treat them accordingly

It is about calling our families and friends by name and telling them that we know something of God’s love, because of the love they show us every day.

It is about telling the world in word and deed, be not afraid: life overcomes death and love overcomes fear – and if you live these truths your life will be transformed, and so therefore, will the world.

This is the hope and power of Easter. This is how we are to live after the resurrection. So when you leave here today,

Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!