

Surprised

The Sunday of the Resurrection, March 31, 2024

RCL Year B: Acts 10:34-43; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11;
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; John 20:1-18; St. Matthew's, Sunbury
The Reverend Dina Carter Ishler, Priest in Charge

*In the Name of God the Father, God the Risen Son,
God the Holy and Lifegiving Spirit, Amen.*

I am going to ask you all a question. I really mean this for everyone here, our children as well as the rest of us, because it is a question they will be just wonderful at answering, and if you have children with you today I'd love it if you can help them think about it. Here it is:

“Can you remember a time when you were surprised by something completely wonderful that happened to you- something so joyful and amazing that it changed you in a really powerful way?”

I want you to take just a moment and think about it. I know you have a story about this that is important to you- we all do. For example, maybe you thought someone at school wasn't really your friend- and that made you unhappy- but then they tapped you on the shoulder and said "Hey! Let's go to recess together." Or you got the job you'd always wanted, or someone you love recovered from being very sick. There are so many different ways to be surprised by something wonderful that happens in our lives.

Maybe the wonderful thing happened on a day when it seemed like everything else had gone wrong and you were worried, nervous, lonely or afraid. Maybe you had hoped that things would happen very differently and you didn't know what to do next. Maybe you were even so sad that you felt like crying.

And, depending on your story, maybe you weren't even sure right away that the wonderful thing did actually happen to you. Maybe you needed to ask questions- maybe you felt like you needed some kind of proof. Maybe you had been so upset by what had happened before- for good reason- that you just weren't quite ready to believe yet. When hard things have happened to us, it's natural to be a little uncertain.

But then- how incredible it is when we finally, deeply, understand that the wonderful thing really has happened to us! Someone calls us by our name in a special way or says things that help us believe it really is true. And we are so eager, so excited, so incredibly glad, that we want to grab on to the person telling us the good news and hold onto the moment forever. We never want to forget this, because it is an amazing feeling. The sadness, the loneliness, the loss of hope we felt before has vanished as if it never was. We almost feel like a different

person than we did just a few minutes before- our world is changed and we are changed as well.

This is the story of Mary and Jesus in today's Gospel- which we heard just a few minutes ago- a story so incredible, almost unbelievable, that it has surprised human beings with the overwhelming joy and gladness of it for over two thousand years. A woman named Mary Magdalene, who had been a devoted follower and caretaker of Jesus' during his earthly ministry, has come to the place where his earthly body rests well before the dawn of the new morning. Picture this with me- it is still dark outside, and she is alone and so sad that she is weeping. She sees that the giant stone that was in front of the tomb that held Jesus' body had been rolled away- which is unbelievable to her- and the tomb is empty- except for two angels in white. They ask her why she is crying, and she tells them it is because she does not know where Jesus' body is resting now. She turns around- and

there is Jesus- *but she does not know that it is Jesus-* until he says her name in such a special way that suddenly, immediately she knows it is him! She is so delighted that she reaches out to hug him- or maybe touch his hand, the story isn't clear- but Jesus says to her: "No, don't do that yet. What I really need you to do instead is go tell my other followers what just happened here." And she does- she says to them: "I have seen the Lord and these are all the things he said to me."

I've always loved thinking about Mary Magdalene in this story, and how surprised and amazed and overjoyed she must have been to see Jesus standing before her, to know it was Jesus when she had been so sad- first because he had died and then because she did not know where his earthly body was resting. Once Jesus calls her by name and her sorrow turns to joy, she has a choice to make based on Jesus' invitation to her: she can stay where she is, in that garden, in that wonderful moment, close to the

Teacher she has known and loved, or she can go proclaim what she has seen and heard first to the disciples, and then to the world.

Beloveds, I believe with all my heart that this is our choice to make as well. Each and every one of us have been changed by the power of this story, especially if we have been walking this road with Jesus towards both Cross and Resurrection- through our prayers and our worship and the familiar scriptures and the beloved hymns that make us feel as if we were there ourselves. Now, we need to go tell everyone how this story has changed us, because Mary's surprise and gladness and her own call to proclaim the risen Lord is ours as well. After all, this is the foundation of everything we believe and proclaim to the world as people who call ourselves 'Christians': that Jesus, the Son of God, died on the Cross and then rose from the dead after three days and because of this the way of eternal life is open to all people. If we

do not accept the invitation to go forward from today- from this joyful Easter service that we are sharing together- and proclaim how the glory and the wonder of this story is for all people- then all the forgiveness and healing and compassion and love that Jesus taught about in his earthly ministry would have been for nothing. And we know that would be a terrible thing, because our schools- our neighborhoods- every part of our world needs the wholeness and restoration of life that can only be of God, and because we are God's people this is our work to do, together.

And so I want you to remember and hold close what it feels like when something so wonderful happens that you can hardly believe it is true- because that is exactly the story we are telling today. Because Jesus has risen from the dead we too have open before us to a way of new and glorious life, not only in this earthly life, but in the life to come. And this promise of new and everlasting

life made real in the Resurrection is what everyone needs to hear and you are the ones to tell them with your voice full of gladness: ***“Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!”***

Amen.