

“Raised with Christ”
April 4, 2021

Colossians 3:1-4
John 20:1-18

“You have been raised with Christ,” Paul writes. “Seek the things that are above, where Christ is.”

Now, the skeptical among us—and that means so many of us, doesn’t it—the skeptical among us might say, “Well, how can you say that we have been raised with Christ? I don’t feel ‘raised.’ I seem to be just as I have always been.

And for the past year so much been monotonously the same.

Such skepticism actually puts us in a place to better understand the resurrection and our lives.

Remember what we heard from the Gospel of John.

“And Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.”

Look at Mary Magdalene—and notice three things.

The first is perhaps the most obvious—she is crying.

It might be her tears that made it possible for many of you to join this Easter worship service online. Maybe just knowing that someone else would share your own sorrow today, knowing that someone else would weep with you allowed you to overcome your reluctance. Or maybe you were surprised and comforted to find that you were not alone in your sorrow today.

We cry for people in Atlanta and Boulder and Minneapolis. We weep for well over half a million lives lost to Covid this past year—especially as we now hear that so many of those losses were unnecessary. We worry that another surge is developing because wearing a mask just seems to be too great of a burden for many and governors are loathe to mandate such a sound public health action. We cry for victims of racism and continuous violence and insatiable greed. Many worship while weeping about family problems, trouble at work, worry from school, concerns about illness and death.

This is not something to regret or try to change. There are few places left outside of congregations, outside of worship where we can bring our weary souls and find some rest. There are few places left outside of congregations like this where we can cry and know that our sorrow is accepted and honored.

Yes, there is joy on this day. Remember, though, that joy is not to be confused with happiness. Joy is an energy that often comes when things are grim or painful. Joy comes uninvited and at the most unexpected times.

There is a joy that is deeper than the good times and the bad times that life hands out, a joy that is stronger than our best attempts and our worst failings—a joy that lifts us when we cannot lift ourselves, a peace that grasps us and returns us renewed.

Through such joy people find the energy to move toward compassion and sharing and beating swords into plowshares. Joy is one of the ways that we move into new life.

Often enough joy is accompanied by sorrow. Often enough joy comes with tears.

Mary weeps. We weep. Yet even in our sorrow we begin to sense the stirring of Easter joy that moves us into new life.

Mary is also confused—even though there is much that she knows.

She was one who followed Jesus and was there when they laid him in the tomb, and so, in the pre-dawn darkness she knows just where to go.

Mary goes back to the tomb because she knows that the tomb was where she would now find Jesus. No longer would he be among those who followed him—making their lives whole, showing them God’s forgiving love, announcing that God’s realm was breaking into this old world, holding out hope that life could be different, the world could be different. No longer would they know his laughter, his tears, the touch of his hand, the sound of his voice. No longer would they feel the way they felt when he was with them—so alive.

Because now Jesus is dead—and like the rest of us, Mary knows that the only way to be near a dead person is to return to the place where that person is buried.

But even in the dark it is clear that something is missing. The stone is rolled away and the result is confusion: “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

And, of course, confusion has been a consistent part of our lives in the past year.

As the pandemic began, we first heard that masks wouldn’t help, only to find that they certainly would. We turned to You-Tube to find out how to wipe down our groceries, only to be told later on, “Don’t bother.” Now that more people are vaccinated, many wonder: “What can I do now? What should I still avoid doing?” We’ve seen confusion being sown for political gain. The lie that the election was stolen is being used further the cause of voter suppression.

In her confusion Mary looks right at Jesus—and thinks she is talking to a gardener.

She looks right at the risen Christ—and thinks she is seeing someone who might know where the dead body of Jesus is.

Is it possible to look at the living Christ and to see someone else?

We do it all the time. Yes, we are masked. Still:

We look at the face of Christ and see the face of someone we don’t think is as good as us.

We look at the face of Christ, and see a teenager asking troubling questions.

We look at the face of Christ, and see a parent or some other hopelessly out of date adult.

We look at the face of Christ, and see refugees whom we would turn away.

We look at the face of Christ, and see the undeserving poor.

The Risen One is not always easily identified, but is present in a thousand faces.

Mary weeps. Mary is confused.

We weep. We are confused.

Now here's the thing that might be most hidden, most forgotten, and maybe most important.

Mary is the bearer of good news.

Mary stayed with the dying Jesus. Mary is the first to encounter the risen Christ. Mary is the first to tell the good news of Easter resurrection to others. We need to say this often and clearly because for centuries the church denied or forgot this reality: Mary—and other women who followed and provided for Jesus as well—stand as equals with the men who followed Jesus.

Mary first, and then other women and men, proclaimed the incredible news that life *has changed* and it will never really be the same again. Human life and all of creation are not just new, but *different*.

And, yes, *we* are different. “You *have been* raised with Christ,” Paul wrote to the early Christians in Colossae. This is not in question. And so, look beyond what is readily apparent. Paul calls this “seeking the things that are above.”

There is something greater than our own lives, something that transcends our everyday, predictable reality. And Easter invites us to stretch ourselves into that new reality—to stretch who we are and what we do.

We who have been raised with Christ will not be bound by old ways of thinking and acting and living. We find new meaning and new purpose for life through the good news that we bring into the world, through acts of compassion, mercy, and healing, through our continuing quest for justice and peace, through the creation of beauty and the pursuit of truth.

The God whose love is stronger than death, the God who is making a new creation calls you by name. You are called, perhaps in spite of yourself, back to life in its abundant fullness. Your life—and how you live—is of great, even eternal, importance. You turn and find that you are in the presence of the living God. And even though we are crying and confused, God sends us into the world with good news.

It doesn't make *sense*—that one who was dead should now be living; that the living One calls to you.

Yet this is just what is happening.

It doesn't make *sense*—that new life is possible even after the worst tragedies.

Yet this is just what is happening.

The living Christ will not be held by anyone, but is free in the world, where we are called to follow. Christ is present in the poor and the afflicted, in every life that we would deem insignificant or unimportant. And this is the amazing thing: Christ is present even in you and me.

Seek the things that are above. Continue with what Martin Luther King, Jr., on this date 54 years ago called “the long and bitter—but beautiful—struggle for a new world.”

Christ is risen.

And not Christ alone. You—yes, you—you have been raised with Christ.