

## “Raised With Christ”

Rev. Debra Given, the Presbyterian Church in Leonia  
April 20, 2014 Easter Year A

Matthew 28:1-10      Colossians 3:1-4

Alleluia! The Lord is risen! (He is risen indeed!)

Thank you for coming to worship on this day of joy. I'm glad to see so many of you here today. We had a wonderful sunrise service. I got up at 5 a.m. to get here on time – unusual for me. It was a little breezy and cool, but the light was beautiful, the birds were singing, and we joined with all nature to rejoice in the miracle and gift of life.

Easter is a time to celebrate God's victory over the forces of sin and evil in this world, and the promise of new life. Today we celebrate that God brings life out of death, and turns the world up-side-down. The first become last and the last become first. The proud and the mighty are brought down, and humble servants are raised up. Alleluia!

But Easter is not possible without the story of suffering and death. We can't forget how people conspired against Jesus, and that he was betrayed by one of his own disciples. We can't forget he was arrested and put on trial by people who had no interest in justice or the truth. He was tortured and felt abandoned by God. Easter does not erase the fact that Jesus died a horrible death at a young age. Many people live with these realities on earth, betrayal, injustice, violence and untimely death. In Christ God joins in our suffering and brings us hope.

Some of you come here today with suffering hearts. We've had two real tragedies in our church this year. And many of you are grieving the loss of loved ones. And I think also of the families who grieve in Korea after the ferry accident last week. It's hard to imagine living with the uncertainty of not knowing whether your children are dead or alive. I read a comment by a pastor a few years ago who talked about her experience of Easter after her 16 year old daughter died of cancer.\* She found hope and comfort in the message of the empty tomb. She wrote, “We are so wrapped up in the life of this world that we forget the amazing life ahead in which we will be in the very presence of God. That is the Easter message,” the hope of being with God beyond this life on earth. But this pastor still felt an emptiness at her daughter's loss, saying, “I understand emptiness better now than ever before... (and) I am not sure that emptiness is so much filled (by the resurrection) as understood.”

She pointed out that after the resurrection, the tomb was still empty. Jesus didn't come back and fill up the empty space, or resume his life as before. But he did offer the disciples new life. And their lives changed dramatically. They discovered a new kind of power within them, God's power to love, God's power to heal, God's power to change the world. And that is also the story of the resurrection. It's not just about what happens to people after they die. Yes, we can look forward to getting beyond the limits of our earthly bodies and finally experiencing the fullness of God. And we can trust our loved ones to God's care. But the resurrection is also about what can happen here and now, as we open

ourselves to God's spirit in this life. There may always be an empty space in our lives. But that's not all there is. God also brings new life to us here.

I think of the Children of Uganda who stayed with our church members for a week this winter as they performed in the area. Many of those children have lost at least one parent to AIDS. Some of them have no adult relatives left at all. They have every reason to be depressed and sad. Yet they have also found an amazing joy in life that shines through them. They have experienced another reality beyond pain and death. They know God's love and are now using their talents to glorify God, and this brings them great joy. God has given them new life.

Karen read from Paul's letter to the Colossians this morning, "So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above... not the things that are on the earth." Does this mean we are to set our minds on heaven and forget about this earthly life? That's not how Jesus lived. When Jesus walked this earth, he healed the sick and fed the hungry, and he wept when his friend Lazarus died. He cared about life on earth and he lived fully. He taught us "the Kingdom of God is in your midst." Right here. Our lives on earth are important.

But Jesus knew, as did Paul, that there is another reality beyond what you can see and feel here. Our hope is not just for this world. To set our minds on things that are above means to live by another reality. We can stand up to sin and evil, turn the other cheek, love our enemies, for we know that whatever happens, whether we live or we die, we belong to God, and God's way will triumph in the end. Christ is risen.

Christ is risen. A tragic fire is not the last word. The death of a beloved child, or sister, or brother, or spouse, is not the last word. A diagnosis of cancer is not the last word. Intimidation and bullying are not the last word. Betrayal and failure are not the last word. For Christ is alive. The Lord is risen. (He is risen indeed.) Christ is risen. (He is risen indeed.)

Today we gather at the table of our Lord. On this day of resurrection we celebrate that Jesus is alive and present with us in the bread and the cup, in our hearts, and among us. We gather with people who are with us here today, sitting in the next pew, whether we know them or not, they are part of our family in Christ. We gather with people throughout the world, those who grieve, those who suffer, all people of faith, beloved by God. And we gather with people who have passed from this life, and are feasting with us in heaven. God's Kingdom is not bound by time and space. But it is here among us. May our eyes be opened.

The Lord is risen. (He is risen indeed.) Alleluia! Amen.

\* "Tammy in Texas" at [www.desperatepreacher.com/bodyii/htm](http://www.desperatepreacher.com/bodyii/htm), 2005.