

Easter Sunday

April 4, 2010

St. Andrew's and St. Swithin's

Acts 10.34-43

Ps 118. 1-2, 14-24

1 Corinthians 15.19-26

Luke 24.1-12

One of the things that happens with the approach of Easter is that there's a lot of egg boiling going on. And lots of egg dyeing. And egg decorating. Some simple, some very elaborate, especially the Ukrainian eggs. There was lots of that going on around here in the parish hall yesterday as well. I'm quite certain you'll see the fruits, or yokes, of their labor today. ☺ But do you know where the tradition of dying eggs came from?

According to tradition, Mary Magdalene was dining with the emperor Tiberius Caesar and proclaiming to him the resurrection of Christ. She then took an egg in her hand as a symbol of the resurrection, a symbol of new life. Tiberius responded that no one could rise from the dead, any more than the egg she held could turn red. Miraculously, the egg immediately began to turn red as testimony to her words. Icons of Mary Magdalene often depict her holding a red egg. This may be the basis for giving each other eggs, especially red ones, at Easter. Therein lies the story behind the lovely icon we have hanging at the back of the church.

Mary Magdalene figures prominently in resurrection stories, especially in John's gospel where she meets Jesus outside the empty tomb and presumes him to be the gardener. In Luke's gospel this morning, she is named as one of the women who went to the tomb with spices, prepared to anoint a body, but found none. Empty. Vacant except for a burial cloth and then the sudden appearance of strange men in dazzling clothes saying puzzling words. We don't have Luke's telling of resurrection appearances yet; that will have to wait for next week. Today, we stay in the drama, the tension, the unknowing of the women and Peter of what had happened.

This gospel reading from Luke is certainly not the most dramatic. Matthew has the earthquake and the angel descending from heaven and the tomb guards so afraid they shook and became like dead men! But in ALL the gospels, it was the women who went to the tomb. If they couldn't have their beloved teacher and Lord with them any longer, at least they could honor him by taking care of his body and being near him in a different way. They did not find what they were looking for.

There are three words in this gospel that are particularly attention getting for me: perplexed, terrified, and remembered.

Perplexed is probably an understatement. The faithful and devoted women only wanted to do one final loving thing for this man who had changed their lives and shown them the way to God. From a distance, they knew something was wrong. They could see INTO the tomb, into the rock. The huge stone had been moved and Jesus' body was gone.

Maybe they wondered where he'd been taken; if he'd been buried somewhere else or thrown off a cliff or hidden because the religious leaders did not want to have his tomb turn into a shrine. Perplexed? I'd say so.

Luke doesn't let us linger there; he sets the drama and moves the women right along to terrified. An accurate description after these two men in dazzling clothes came from nowhere. The dazzling part is a clue to them that it is a divine appearance and that would be frightening. Perhaps they had heard about Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain where HIS clothes had been made dazzling white. Luke doesn't comfort the women in their fear, but the other evangelists do. Be not afraid those angels say. Something new has happened and the world is never going to be the same. Your life is being shaken up and God is going to demand new things of you. But it's going to be all right. Easter proves it.

The events which have been unfolding over the past several days have cosmic significance. NT Wright says that as Jesus goes to the cross, heaven and earth, God's space and our space, are drawn together in a new way. On this day, God has lit a new fire in our midst.

We are receiving the same gift the women did that first Easter morning. We are being made living members of a living Christ. They will see him, touch him, and hear his voice. In the Holy Eucharist, we will have his body pressed into our hands, and we will drink his new wine. Do not look for the living among the dead. The egg is red.

Easter is the feast of the abundance of God. Amazing grace pours from the body of the crucified. Christ himself, the Risen One, fills the sacraments with life-giving power. He has taken us, in all our fear and brokenness, and made us his own forever.

And then the women remembered. They remembered what he had told them about how he would die and be raised up on the third day. They remembered the miracles which had shown the truth of his relationship with God. When they remembered, they went and told what they had seen and heard.

It is for us to remember. It is what we have done all week. We have remembered, we have recalled to our minds, we have made present in us Jesus' passion, death, and now unbelievable resurrection. We do it every Sunday and with every celebration of the Eucharist. It is called anamnesis; a conscious bringing forward of the past to the present to experience it as now, today, not something nostalgic or distant or faded, but as vibrant and life-giving as on the first occasion.

Today we remember. We may still be perplexed. After all, something happened which changed the course of human history. Something which is now the hinge point for the measuring of all time. God has raised the dead to life. The women went to find the past and discovered the future. They sought a corpse and found God. And they remembered.

Each Easter we are called to remember; to bring present that which is past. To claim it again as our own as the first time. God's new creation has begun; and we are summoned to be part of that, part of the new world in which earth and heaven have become one. To remember and then to tell.

The power of God seen through the resurrection of Jesus is now ours; our strength, our energy, our comfort, and our guide. Jesus died and is alive evermore and meets us this happy morning in triumph and victory. The egg is red. Alleluia, alleluia!

Gail Wheatley+