

# EASTER SUNDAY 2018

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Before settling in on consideration of the resurrection today, I have three other things that I'd like to share with you.

First, my wife Angela sends you her greetings today from our home in Tulare.

The second is simply to recognize that so many hard working members of this parish have made this morning possible....a few of them aren't even here this morning due to flying off to be on tour in the Holy Land. But it is good to know that they have been there without incident, and yesterday were in fact in Jerusalem, and THEY have wished US a glorious Easter celebration. Were that we were with THEM right now, rubbing shoulders with a massive number of Christians having gathered as pilgrims in what could otherwise be known not only as Holy Zion, but the City of the Resurrection. For them and all on tour from around San Diego, we pray for safety in travel, to return with wonderful stories to their witness.

For the rest of us here, much personal sacrifice has also been made to see that things were ready for this festival day and season of Easter. On behalf of God who sees these things, and of this parish, Thank you.

Lastly, I have for many years taken the opportunity from the pulpit to include some guilt-laden comment especially aimed at those who haven't been to church since Christmas, or even last Easter. During this Lent, especially as we have considered several of the obstacles that undermine the Mission of Jesus, and thus the Mission of the Church, I have been brought up short on this kind of preaching, and I repent of it. I have been an obstacle, and I don't want to be one again.

**April 1, 2018**

However.....I do have this favorite story to tell that I think is just really funny, and I think you will too, and hope you can appreciate it. So with your indulgence and forgiveness, I'd like to share it with you.

The story is told of a man coming out of church one Easter Sunday with a friend of his who he'd managed to break his habit on Sundays and join him on this one day. They were going through the greeting line after the service to shake hands with the Rector who was standing at the door as he always did. But then the priest grabbed his friend by the hand and pulled him aside. The Rector said to him, "You need to join the Army of the Lord." The Rector questioned him, "How come I don't see you except at Christmas and Easter?" The man got close to the priest's ear and whispered, "I'm in the secret service."

What a wonderful, awesome, humbling day it is.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

[He is risen indeed. Alleluia]

I have spoken this past Holy Week, and even before during Lent, about the possibility of seeing Jesus in his humanity with his own display of deepest intent knowing who he was with us, being on mission; as well of his own display of human and divine emotion, as on Good Friday among other times, which helps us sometimes better relate to him, and take some comfort in his understanding of our human condition, as the author of the letter to the Hebrews says, "**15** *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who was tempted in every way that we are, yet was without sin.* 4:15

Let's go that way again today. I'm going to do this sermon as a two-parter. Today, Part 1. And Next Sunday, we'll do Easter part 2. So be here!

On the one hand I am quite confident that God the Father, who had to have had some sense of separation Himself in being present in the

**April 1, 2018**

sacrifice and the death of the Son of God for sinners such as us, that our God the Father is himself speaking praise and adoration for the successful resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The same words spoken over Jesus at his baptism and at the mountain top transfiguration would be now as well, "This is my well beloved Son. In Him I am well pleased." And if in some mysterious way we could fully understand it, God would be looking forward for the Ascension of God, after this death and resurrection of God.

The ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven which will be celebrated 40 days from now.

And here is where I want to take this day of resurrection and open it up like a spread sheet to look at those 40 days; to look at a particular aspect of Jesus that we might overlook, but in discovery could help us have even more comfort and confidence in our Risen Lord being available to us in the least and the worst of our own human conditions and emotions, and never give up the Mission.

These 40 days after Jesus rose from the dead are very significant both is witness to the resurrection and of his continued ministry. During this season of Easter Sundays we will hear of the testimony of him walking and talking in places where His ministry had been; He was seen in His restored body by thousands; He healed many; He continued to preach, He continued to love. And then He ascended to Heaven, taken up in the sky, which also was witnessed by others.

For Forty days Jesus showed the world that He lived again, that he had risen from the dead. The Sanhedrin had called Jesus a blasphemer, and others claimed His miracles were of the devil... but His 40 days in Jerusalem and surrounding areas, being seen by multitudes, was scarcely disputed. For instance, the contemporary Jewish historian Josephus referred to it, as did other writers. AS well, toward the end of Paul's writings, he makes note of the 500 people who were still alive who had seen Jesus after his death. Two generations later, the writer Eusebius interviewed many people who had known people who saw Jesus during these days, told of miracles, even cited sermons and letters of the risen Jesus.

**April 1, 2018**

In other words, some people might not have joined the Christ-followers – although believers multiplied rapidly, even in the face of persecution soon thereafter – but very few people disputed that He rose from the dead.

Those certainly were active days in the Mission of the Jesus. The last verse of the last gospel's last book (*John 21:25*) tells us, "Jesus also did many other things. If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written."

Yet as busy as He must have been from the resurrection until his ascension, here he was still walking the earth. And not always with anyone. Considering the moments when Jesus is not talked about being with the disciples, I have a picture in my mind of Jesus alone, also, maybe when darkness fell, down lonely paths, maybe through storms and cold silences, walking the dark hills, not responding to the curious crowds, but seeking out the troubled and the hurting individuals.

In one sense this is the antipathy of the Secret Service Easter attender from my story earlier. He tried to excuse his absence. Jesus is simply continuing exactly who he is, and even better, he takes time to consider the enormity of what is yet to come.

This is a plausible picture, because Jesus still does this today. It was in His nature: Remember the "ninety and nine," and the one lost sheep the shepherd sought; remember His story of the father rejoicing over the prodigal son who repents and returns and is restored; remember His admonition to be "fishers of men"; remember the promise that "Whosoever" believes should not perish but have eternal life. He walks the dark hills, looking for us – piercing the gloom with a joyful hope that may be ours.

And, continuing to reconstruct an image of what Jerusalem must have been like those 40 days, abuzz with talk of the Miracle Man, let us also remember that we don't have to respond in our own strength to a

**April 1, 2018**

knock on the door – "Come! They say that Jesus is down by the river! Let's see Him!" No... He will come to us. And it is especially the case, I believe, if you are one of those people who is skeptical, or has "heard enough," or cannot crack the shell of hurt or pain or resentment or rebellion or fear, or all the other hindrances that prevent us from experiencing the love of Christ.

The word and witness is clear as from Acts read today,  
; <sup>40</sup> *but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, <sup>41</sup> not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."*

Listen ....the Risen Jesus is closer than a shadow, no matter what you think, or what you might prefer to believe. You might have experienced, say, the nightmare of something like a crib death, and the loneliness after; remember that Jesus offers peace that passes understanding. You might have health scares, insecure about your very life and what your place on earth is and the loneliness during; remember that Jesus walks the dark hills to guide you and me. You might have had problems with drugs, and the law, and custody, maybe losing your home, lonely with nowhere to turn; remember that Jesus offers you refuge. You might be someone who has tried to shake addictions time after time after time; remember that the feeling around your shoulders is Jesus hugging you tightly. Whatever your loss, your pain, your loneliness, remember that, through it all, trust is more important than understanding.

I credit Rick Marschall for much of this thought of the Jesus who seems lonely through his 40 days of resurrection belongs. Rick is a prolific writer, and one time editor for Marvel Comics, and even for Disneyland cartoons. Hey, what more authority does our culture need than Marvel and Disney?! Rick refers to a powerful song written by Audra Czarnikow, who at 65 years old was moved to reflect on her growing up

**April 1, 2018**

and her faith in God. It was first recorded in 1969 by Ray Lewis of the Hallelujah Minstrels. I commend it to you. But for today here is the first chorus:

The risen Savior, Lord of Creation, walks the dark hills, he walks what we would call those lonely places, WILLING to be in such loneliness himself, not unaccustomed to it. But not now as much a hopeless lonely, as a lonely on purpose, a mission of His risen life through the Holy Spirit, to seek out... me? and you? where we are? in our hurts, in our messes?

If that is the continuation of the miracle of the Resurrection still – that He loves you and me, perhaps we might have found our own mission when we find ourselves lonely, that there is a purpose, and a place and a person to which God would have US go, not to stay and sink, but to look to see how the risen Christ will work through us to first bring his comfort, and then bring that other person in need to the living, healing, comforting, powerful, sustaining Jesus Christ.... Who is Alive.

Alleluia. Christ is Risen.

[He is risen indeed. Alleluia]

**April 1, 2018**