

Easter Sunday, 4 April 2010
Saint James Episcopal Church, Tigard OR
The Rev'd Raggs Ragan, Rector

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

We made it! Through the long weeks of Lenten fast and prayer. Through the intense and dramatic days of holy week. Through the self-examination and discipline. Through all the cleaning and physical preparation. Through the hail and wind and rain. We made it! Easter has come and we are here to celebrate! Alleluia!

Last year we endured a winter so fierce that Christmas was delayed for days. And Easter found us in the midst of blooming trees and gardens. This year everything bloomed so early that we thought it might be summer by now – but instead winter seems to be making a short return appearance. It does not matter. Whatever the weather, whatever the season evident in the plants – this is the first full moon after the Vernal Equinox – this is Easter – and we are here to celebrate!

Today's psalm concludes with the oft-quoted lines, "On this day the Lord has acted; *we will rejoice and be glad in it."

Throughout the readings we find the sense of wonder, of marvelous, unexpected things leading to rejoicing. We heard one of Isaiah's descriptions of the world transformed into the Peaceable Kingdom, where "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; ... [and] They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain" – a compelling image of peaceful, joyful life for everyone.

In the Gospel those sad and discouraged women, filled with grief and fear, made their weary way to the tomb, laden with oils and spices, with all they needed to properly honor the body of someone they loved. They went with heavy hearts and minds, determined to do their duty.

But they met something totally unexpected. They did not find Jesus' body, but were instead confronted by two unknown people in bright clothing, chiding them for "looking for the living among the dead". The women were confused and frightened, but were able to recognize the truth of what they were told. Jesus was dead but is no longer dead. Jesus has found his way through death to new life. He is risen! Of course they rejoiced.

And of course they ran to tell everyone else. This is what we do – or hope we do – when we discover a wonderful surprise. Isaiah shared his glimpse of God's glorious future with everyone. In Acts we see Peter sharing the disciples' experiences of Jesus' resurrection with everyone he can find. This is what we do.

And this desire to share the delightful surprises we have discovered leads us to bring people like Delia to baptism. We share our amazing stories – a future of peace among all creatures, life beyond death, a community where everyone is accepted and loved. We invite people to share our experience of a loving God embracing us.

Sometimes we are the women, who encountered the angels, who saw the empty tomb, who knew for themselves that Jesus was alive. We are the people with something wonderful to tell about.

Sometimes we are Peter and the others who hear the stories, but are not convinced, who need to see for ourselves. One often hears people complaining about the skepticism of those male disciples and of the general low status of women in the first century, women who could not offer testimony in court, whose word had no legal weight. But truly what they were saying was so remarkable that it would have been hard to believe from anyone. I do not think they were doubted just because they were women. After all, Thomas does not believe the whole assembly of disciples when he happens to be away at Jesus' first appearance in the Upper Room.

The need to see for ourselves is a natural human impulse. And so we invite people to come and see. See the community united to this Risen Jesus, united to one another in the love and acceptance he offers. Come and see. Join us in rejoicing. Join us in the risen life that cannot be defeated by death.

Corrina and Paul, Nancy, Natalie, and Benjamin are bringing Delia today to the waters of baptism to come and see – come and see this community of love and acceptance, of blessing and joy.

Throughout this past week we have immersed ourselves in Jesus' suffering and death, reminding ourselves of the extraordinary love of God which endures the worst that human beings can offer to bring us love that conquers even death. We have been awestruck by that love poured out for us.

We say of the baptismal water: "In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit." We bring Delia and everyone to share in this wonderful experience of love that conquers death, love that will sustain her through every trauma of her life, as it does each one of us.

Delia's middle name is Genevieve, after her great-grandmother whose last years were spent as a beloved member of our community. In baptism we are welcoming Delia into a community which will love her as it loved Genevieve. This is a gift and wonder, a community which does indeed embrace all people, which is animated by that spirit of love which endured an agonizing death only to rise again stronger than ever, a love which cannot be defeated. Alleluia!

All Lent long we have suppressed our Alleluias, never saying or singing this word of joyful praise and celebration. It has been locked away, mute for the duration of our time in the wilderness.

But today there are alleluias everywhere. It is the very first and the very last word of every Easter service. Our two hymns thus far have an Alleluia at the end of each line. There are bright colored alleluias scattered in all the pews. I invite you to tuck one or two in your pocket where it can surprise you later, remind you of the love and joy offered freely to each one of us. Take one to share with a friend who may need a little joy. And invite them to come and see for themselves. On this day the Lord has acted; let us rejoice and be glad in it! Alleluia!