

**The Rev. Dr. Hilary B. Smith**

**Holy Comforter**

**Richmond, VA**

**March 27, 2016; Easter Sunday**

**Readings:** Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Luke 24:1-12.

## **Finding the Risen Christ**

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?

He is not here, but has risen.”

Why are you looking for Jesus here?

Well, there are very good reasons why the women were looking for Jesus in the tomb.

They saw him die on the cross.

The tomb where he had been taken, well, that is the place to find him.

Or is it?

Imagine the grief in their hearts...their best friend, their leader, the one who was supposed to bring them freedom from the oppression of the Romans, freedom from everything that oppressed them, had been betrayed by one of their own, arrested, tried and executed.

It was over; the dream had died.

They were looking for his body; for what else would they be looking?

In order to find something, it helps to know for what one is looking.

Where do we look for Jesus; where do we look for Resurrection?

Where do we find Resurrection and know the Risen Christ?

There is an intense controversy going on in England right now in regard to Easter.

There have been many disagreements within the Anglican communion in recent years...but this one has the people truly engaged.

USA Today reports, “Chocolate manufacturers in the U.K. have

removed the word 'Easter' from the holiday egg candy that has delighted millions of children for generations."<sup>1</sup>

All this struggle, USA Today reports, is happening on "the eve of Christianity's most important holiday."

I lived in England for two years, and I can tell you that these eggs are a big deal.

But never fear, the Christians on on it.

Says one such Christian:

"It's deeply disappointing and shameful that some of the biggest companies...are censoring the countries' old tradition', said David Marshall, CEO of the **Meaningful Chocolate** Co., a group set up in an attempt to reintroduce Easter eggs and Advent Calendars featuring Nativity scenes..."

Really?

Really?!

I'm always fascinated by how the Christian faith comes into the mainstream media, and how we Christians choose to spend our time and energy, "protecting" the faith...where are we looking for Jesus?

And when you play this whole thing out, of course the word "Easter" is derived from the name of a pagan goddess, who represented spring and fertility.

So are the Christians fighting unknowingly to make the eggs more pagan?

Perhaps they ought to be lobbying to call these "Resurrection" eggs.

Where are we looking for Jesus, the Risen Christ?

(As an aside, we are having an Easter Egg hunt today...and perhaps because I did not grow up in the Church and didn't attend a great Sunday School or children's chapel, such as our children do, I didn't grow up knowing that these eggs represent the empty tomb, at least according to some sources, because they look like stones, dead objects, but when they

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2016/03/25/easter-eggs-united-kingdom/82251482/>

are not filled with candy, they have living beings inside them, who break free of the egg and live).

Like many Christian traditions, we make use of pagan symbols and words to express what we know as God's on-going life with us.

What else could the first Christians do, to express in words and symbols their experience of the Risen Christ?

Those women, at the tomb, were standing on the threshold of a new world. They were not looking for that...they went there that morning thinking they were going to a tomb, something dead, something about the past.

But then something not only expected but unimaginable happened.

According to the story, two men in dazzling clothes appear, angels sent by God...and they remind the women of what Jesus had said...that he would rise again.

"Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again."

And they remembered.

Remembering, in the context of our relationship with God, is sacramental; we remember and through the power of the Spirit we experience the grace of that memory...we do this every time we celebrate the Eucharist, do this in remembrance of me.

In remembering, we encounter grace anew.

The women remember, and perhaps in that moment, they experienced the grace of God, which gave them courage to go...to go and tell the others...to go and tell the men.

Why are you looking for living among the dead?

Don't look for Jesus here in the tomb...He is risen; the whole world has changed; life has changed; death is conquered.

And it was in leaving the tomb...and moving out into their life in this new reality...Jesus is not in the tomb, he is risen, what can this mean?...it

is there in their lives that they meet Jesus again...on that road to Emmaus...and on all the other roads they would take. Our faith is sort of like this too---when it is firmly entrenched in the past---in Sunday school lessons of our childhood or early ideas about church or religion., or even last year's ideas..we are most likely not going to find Jesus there.

For Jesus, God, the Risen Christ, is with us now, in the very real and challenging world in which we live.

So where are we looking for Jesus, the Risen Christ, God's on-going life with us?

There is a cartoon -- a woman is in her home and two men come to her door, they ask her, "have you found Jesus?"

And we see over her shoulder, a figure behind a drape, with his sandals visible.

Funny, but it makes the point that we find the Risen One in the most ordinary of places, in places we spend our time, and in the relationships that we have.

When the women go and tell the men that what they have heard, what they have seen, the men do not believe them.

It is hard to believe based on what others tell us.

That is why Peter runs to see for himself.

It is hard to believe in new life when all around us is death.

I must confess to you that there have been many times when it has been easier for me to believe in Good Friday than to believe in Easter.

When the challenges of life, on the world stage or in my life personally, seem too much to handle, Good Friday made a lot of sense, but not Easter.

Violence in our world and things that seem beyond our control speak to us of Good Friday...often...

After the terrorist attacks in Paris last November, I saw a video of a father talking to his son about the attacks, they live in Paris.

The boy spoke of the bad men and what they did.  
 Maybe they should move.  
 What are they to do because the bad men have guns.  
 And his father replies, “yes, they have guns but we have flowers.”<sup>2</sup>  
 Can the flowers protect us?... the boy asks.  
 Yes, his father says, see the people putting them everywhere.  
 And the reporter asks the boy if he feels better.  
 Yes, I feel better...says the boy.

See the people putting the flowers everywhere.  
 It was like they were putting flowers on the cross and proclaiming that the  
 ways of death are not the last word.  
 The Risen Christ is found all over...in every place...and even in the words  
 of one who was not making a Christian statement of faith, but we can  
 see Easter there...and know the Risen Christ in his words.  
 In order to find something, it helps to know for what one is looking.

The first Christians saw the Risen Christ all around them, and named their  
 experience with them words and concepts known to them.  
 We can do that too.  
 Where do you see the Risen Christ?  
 What words would you use, what images have spoken to you of God’s  
 great love for you and our world; what images in our time speak to  
 you of the new life, eternal life?

We know that terror is real; that violence is real; that there are many hard  
 things...but they are not the last word.  
 Easter teaches us that God wins...and God wins for all of us.  
 Easter tells us that we are free for all that oppresses; that we are free from  
 the death-dealing ways of the world, and from death itself.

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<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/paris-terror-attacks/fathers-talk-son-about-paris-terror-attack-goes-viral-n464981>

Love wins...Flowers win.

The flowering of our cross that the children did, is a gift to us.  
Perhaps a way to pray about this day, and where you can find the Risen Christ, is to imagine a cross that is in your life...this cross can be very personal and or it could be a cross that you see dominating the life of others or all people.

What is the cross that you see before you?

Put a flower on it...as a sign of hope, as a sign of Resurrection.

In prayer, we can put a flower on that symbol of death that grips our mind---it maybe a memory or an image from the media.

Put a flower on it or two flowers or a 100.

Each one could be a prayer.

Perhaps imagine Jesus, Risen and active, putting a flower or many flowers on your cross.

Know that God is bringing new life to everything that speaks of death to you, even death itself.

God gives us new life, eternal life, through the Resurrection.

Imagine Jesus coming to you and giving you a flower, putting flowers all over your cross...each flower being God's love and grace, God's power to make all things new. Amen.