

Easter Sunday, April 5, 2015
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon – : “Fully Human and Fully Divine”

Sermon

All last week we experienced Jesus as a human being.

We shared his anguish as he contemplated the events that were to take place.

We felt the pain of betrayal by trusted friends, the outrage of false accusations, the emotion of a crowd gone wild, the physical strain of carrying the cross, the pain of being nailed to a cross and left to die.

We witnessed the stark separation of body and soul as life flowed out of the wound in his side.

We shared the grief of the women who loved him standing at the foot of the cross as he took his last breath.

We understand these feelings.

We too have been betrayed by people we love.

We know what it feels like to have someone in power over us change a story to fit their needs.

We have seen celebratory crowds deteriorate into violent mobs.

We have watched beloved companions draw their last breath.

We know this Jesus.

We are this Jesus.

Fully human.

But today is Easter.

Today is the day that we are introduced to the full divinity of Jesus Christ.

Today is the day that we remember, that God has the power to conquer death.

Today we celebrate, with hearts full of joy that the betrayers, the power mongers, the rioting crowds do not have the last word.

Today we remember that we are a Resurrection People – a people so beloved by God that we will be given infinite opportunities to start over – to make all things new.

Resurrection is more than some mysterious, magical event that happened two millennia ago.

Scripture offers us resurrection as something more than what happened to Jesus.

Resurrection is something that is built into the universe and that touches every part of creation.

You and I, heaven and earth, animal and plant - we are all resurrected, and we all participate in resurrection life.

Resurrection is not so much an event as it is the basic, underlying principle of all life.

Resurrection is not so much a past miracle as it is a present, lived reality, and a source of hope for the future - whatever it may hold, both this side of the grave and beyond.

Resurrection is not just something we receive, but a moving, motivating force that turns us into life-givers carrying life into our world in whatever way we can.

Today is a day for joy!

The Easter story, so familiar to us, is full of nuances.

There is much to be learned by looking carefully at John's account.

Let's start with Mary Magdalene.

All four gospels place Mary Magdalene at the tomb on Easter morning.

Mary has been a steadfast companion on the journey and now she is chosen by Jesus to be the first witness to his resurrection.

Mary is not afraid to admit her affiliation with Jesus.

She begs the angels to tell her where they have moved the body so that she might claim it.

Jesus dispatches Mary to be the first to share the Good news.

In choosing Mary, Jesus signals that in his kingdom the humble shall be exalted.

Next we have Peter.

Peter has always been the disciple with the great bravado.

He felt compelled to swear his allegiance, to compete for top ranking with the other disciples.

Peter however is also the disciple who denied knowing Jesus just a few days ago.

We don't know if his race to the empty tomb is to seek the risen Christ or to be the first on hand for a big event.

What we do know is that by reintroducing Peter as an important disciple we are shown the abundance of God's grace and forgiveness.

In the kingdom, new beginnings are offered to all.

The other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, races on ahead but once he sees the neatly folded burial clothes he understands that Jesus was not carried away by bandits, but somehow moved beyond those earthly binds.

We learn from this unnamed follower that there are many ways that one might come to believe in God.

In the kingdom the unexpected will provide a glimpse into the mystery and grandeur of God's power.

All four gospels use the presence of angels to offer an explanation for what has happened.

I can't help but wonder if there are angels waiting in the shadows to guide us when we are confused or afraid.

Have we closed ourselves off from this divine communication by our scurrying about seeking answers elsewhere?

Perhaps, God's kingdom is populated with divine beings that could guide us and help us to make sense of the world when life seems overwhelming and incomprehensible.

Our last character in John's story is Jesus himself, standing in the garden.

As Mary weeps, he is there, as he is always there...comforting, reassuring, caring, loving.

She recognizes him when he says her name, 'Mary'.

I imagine it as a quiet 'Mary' almost a term of endearment.

I picture them in the garden ever so briefly clinging to one another until Jesus gently pushes her away and explains that he must go to the Father, to God.

And this is what it all comes down to.

In the kingdom that Jesus has introduced, death is not the final act.

Love triumphs over death.

Faith overcomes sorrow.

New life flourishes from barren soil.

In this kingdom resurrection is a way of life.

Jesus Christ was nailed to a cross, died and rose again to prove that the old rules do not apply.

No amount of power or violence or greed or selfishness will overcome the light that has come into the world.

The good news of Easter is that we are invited to live in this kingdom.

I hope that you will hear this good news and take it to heart.

I pray that this Easter morning will be transformative for you – that you will leave this encounter changed.

I pray that you will come to understand that you are a child of God, baptized, blessed and beloved.

I pray that you will make a commitment this day to live as a disciple of Christ – as a Christian.

I pray that you will find yourself in the gospel story and go out to seek love, forgiveness and grace.

I wish you every Easter blessing from a heart filled with joy.