

EASTER DAY

Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you. Mark 16:7

What are the women to think? They have seen their beloved leader betrayed, arrested, tried, convicted, and executed as a political terrorist in the most public, humiliating, and agonizing way. All their hopes have been shattered, their movement has been destroyed, and their men have abandoned them in fear and cowardice.

And yet, and yet, they are faithful. Against all odds, they persist in their love and care for Jesus. They do what honor and ritual demand; they buy spices and go to the tomb where Jesus has been laid to anoint him. Probably the routine, a prescribed activity, provides them some calm and comfort in the midst of chaos, terror, and despair.

They wonder about practical obstacle – who will roll away the heavy stone that has been placed across the tomb’s entrance? But when they arrive, behold! The stone has been removed. And a strange young man in a white robe delivers an even stranger message, *Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.*

What can this mean? What *can* this mean? And that question has echoed down two thousand years of Christian history. Two thousand years of Christian faith and practice, and the question is as lively today as it was on that first Easter morning in Palestine. *He has been raised, he is not here.*

What *can* this mean? The other morning I read a short piece on The New York Times editorial page by the wonderful writer Verlyn Klinkenborg, a piece called **Listen**. (NYT, Thursday, April 9) It was about the Beatles, in particular about a remastered issue of their music due out in September. Klinkenborg talks about the effect the Beatles’ early music had on him as a teenager.

It was straight-ahead playing and singing, brash and tuneful. I measured it by the way it made my nerves jump and the fact that I didn't even want to think that my parents might be overhearing it. It was for me alone, for some part of me that didn't even exist before I heard that music.

It was for me alone, for some part of me that didn't even exist before I heard that music. That, I believe, is what Jesus of Nazareth represented to his followers. He was *for some part of them that didn't even exist before they heard that music.* He gave a new dimension to their identity, their sense of themselves and their sense of possibility. He created something new in the history of human understanding, human faith, human hope.

Now when Jesus is executed, all the disciples seem to lose that part of themselves for a while. It's understandable. It's as if, I don't know, those of us whose adolescence was defined by the Beatles discovered that they had been lip-synching all alone. Betrayal, chaos, and despair!

But no. What the Resurrection means, whatever else it means – the Resurrection means that Jesus' followers find again in themselves that *part of themselves that hadn't existed* before Jesus. They locate again that dimension, that understanding, faith, and hope. They recover their sense of possibility. And they go on, they go out, to change the world forever.

I reckon that all of us here this morning wonder about the meaning of the Resurrection. I know I do. What can it possibly mean *that Jesus has been raised, that he is not here, that he has gone ahead to Galilee?*

What it means for me is that Jesus is *some part of me that didn't exist before I heard his music.* That part of me, that music of Jesus – I've been listening to that even longer than I've been listening to *I Want to Hold Your Hand.* Because sometime even before *Please Please Me* and *Love Me Do*, Jesus *Saw Me Standing There*, and walked into my life.

And on many mornings, but never more than this one, I'm reminded of that. I find again, with great gratitude and joy and hope, that part of me that didn't exist before Jesus was raised from the dead.

And my prayer for each and every one of you here this morning, why ever you are what, whatever brought you to church this Easter morning,

whatever you are hoping for– I pray you may hear the music that is for you alone, for some part of you that didn't exist before you heard it.

The music that we all sing together as we proclaim Alleluia, Jesus is Risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen