

## He is risen, so what?

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Alleluia the Lord is risen  
The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia

The Lord is risen so what?

Did I get your attention? Good! "So what" is a perfectly legitimate question. So what does this mean? So what does Jesus the risen Son of God mean? What difference does it make? When the women told the men what had happened they thought it an idle tale! What makes this so much more than an idle tale?

Our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry in his Easter message cautioned against turning the resurrection into a fairy tale. There is nothing wrong with fairy tales he said but:

*"The truth is even as we speak this Holy Week, we do so not only in the shadow of the cross but we do so in the shadow of those who have been killed in Brussels, of those who have been wounded and maimed, of those who weep and mourn. And of a world mourning, and not too sure how to move forward. And this world does not need another fairy tale. This week's story of crucifixion and resurrection is not a fairy tale....The truth is, the way the world very often operates is not working out. It's not sustainable. It's not the way to life. Jesus has shown us the way. He has shown us that unselfish, sacrificial love, love of God, and love of the other, is the way to life. That, my friends, is the ultimate reality. And that's not a fairy tale."<sup>1</sup>*

If Jesus' resurrection doesn't change you, change the world then it is a big so what. It is just an idle tale. Easter becomes just another American holiday where the important activities are Easter egg hunts, new outfits, dinner and maybe a stop in church.

I started thinking about this a couple weeks ago watching the evening news. The story was about some mega church that held a big Easter egg hunt. This church hired a helicopter to drop 10,000 eggs in a field for everybody to collect. By the way the activity was held with two weeks left to go in Lent, but let's not let a season of penitence and fasting get in the way of our fun. The comment from a mom that got my attention was, "What a great way to celebrate Easter. " REALLY? Is that all Easter is to this person. Apparently she is not alone. One day this week watching the noon news while I had some lunch the reporter was eagerly interviewing someone who was describing all the things to do on this Easter weekend. There was not a single mention of any church

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<sup>1</sup> <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2016/03/23/easter-2016-message-from-presiding-bishop-michael-curry/>

services or that going to church was even one of the things to do, so congratulations to all of you who showed up here this morning.

What started me thinking about is that Easter really is about how hard it is to be a Christian in today's world. Being a Christian is as countercultural now as it was in the time of the first Easter. Somehow Christianity has gotten locked up with the prosperity Gospel and becomes some sort of holy insurance policy. If you believe the right things and do the right things you will be successful in this world and get into heaven in the next. The Risen Christ is about victory but not necessarily success. The Risen Christ is about love, the love that God has for each and every one of us that Bishop Curry mentioned in the quote I used.

The other event that started pushing me down this line was the letter to the church issued by the House of Bishops. The House of Bishops is made up of all the bishops in the Episcopal Church from the United States and 17 other countries that are all part of our church. They stated in a letter to the church read last week on Palm Sunday that:

*In this moment, we resemble God's children wandering in the wilderness. We, like they, are struggling to find our way. They turned from following God and worshiped a golden calf constructed from their own wealth. The current rhetoric is leading us to construct a modern false idol out of power and privilege. We reject the idolatrous notion that we can ensure the safety of some by sacrificing the hopes of others. No matter where we fall on the political spectrum, we must respect the dignity of every human being and we must seek the common good above all else.*

What the bishops are talking about is of course some of the current political climate and the fact the many seem to have lost what it means to be a Christian. The reality is that Jesus spoke truth to power and challenged those in power to consider the view from the bottom; to care for the poor, the widow, the orphan, the sick, the refugee. The bishops raise good questions and ones we should consider.

So what? So what are we to do? Next Sunday we will host Bishop Holly when he makes a visit to Baptize, Confirm and Receive new members to our parish and the Episcopal Church. In both the class for our youth and the adult class we spent time looking at the baptismal promises that they will make standing in front of the Bishop. One of the adults looked at the last promise in the baptismal covenant and asked why is this so hard for people to do? The last promise is the one mentioned in the Bishop's letter that refers to respecting the dignity of every human being.

I will ask you to reaffirm your baptismal vows in just a few moments and I really want you all to take a good long look at what you are saying so open your prayer books up to page 293 and look at the last three promises.

## **Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?**

This promise demands that we do more than just pay lip service to the gospel the followers of Jesus are expected to proclaim. This is not just about talking a good game, but do you live the Gospel? What if you walked around all day like I often do in a uniform that says I am a Christian, a priest, a minister? Would it change how you behaved? For you are all ministers by your baptism. Everybody is a minister in our church we just have different ways of living out that ministry. How do you minister to the world in how you proclaim the Gospel by your actions as well as your words?

## **Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?**

Ah yes the love your neighbor piece. Remember the man who asked Jesus who is my neighbor and Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan. Can anybody tell me an exception that Jesus made to his definition of neighbor? Is this hard, absolutely but Jesus said this is one of the two great commandments. On the commandment to love God and love neighbor every other law in the Bible must be judged. Everything we do is judged by this standard

## **Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?**

This is the one that seems so difficult for so many people. However those who wrote these promises did not allow for any wiggle room. The operative word for me is "all" not some, not the ones who are easy to respect but all. That is hard work and it is work that Jesus showed us how to do.

Our Sundays in Lent program looked at a series about the future of the church by Diane Butler Bass who was the keynote speaker at our council meeting in 2015. She told the story of visiting a parish that had an art competition to show the future of the church. The winning entry was a table for 16 set up on the altar space. Only three seats were occupied. The rest were all labeled with groups that were missing from the table in most churches. People with disabilities of several types, LGBT people, Vets suffering from PTSD, refugees and the list went on. That is what respecting the dignity of every human being looks like and it is the future of the church if we are to have a future. Respecting the dignity of every human being is about making more seats at the table not fewer.

Our Presiding Bishop calls all us to be part of the Jesus movement and so I challenge you to consider the cost of being a member of that movement, a follower of the Risen Christ. I challenge you to speak up when the dignity of another is being rejected or stomped on. To live a life that says yes I am a Christian and I am proud to say it. I challenge more than anything else to ask a very important question. If you were arrested today and charged with being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Or would the judge and jury say, no I don't see any evidence that warrants conviction case dismissed.

I close with the words of our Presiding Bishop:

*GO! Go forth into this world. Don't be afraid. And don't be ashamed to be people of love. And go forth into this world and help us to change it from the nightmare it often is into the dream that God intends.*