

# Easter

Acts 10:34-43; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Mark 16:1-8

Virginia Urbanek

“Alleluia! Christ is Risen. The Lord is risen indeed.” What a profound message at the end of what was for me, and I hope for you, a “holy” week - a time of anxiety, waiting and watching, a time of trying to put busy-ness aside, a time of anticipation, a time of impatience, of wanting to shout that first alleluia, to breathe in the glory of this day, the flowers, the singing, the alleluias. It was a week that began last Sunday with the triumph of the Palm Sunday parade but moved quickly through the reading of the passion Gospel. The week embraced every human emotion possible, love, betrayal, tears, pain, tender good-byes, absolute earth wrenching horror and abandonment. I cried as I do every year as I read the words from John on Maundy Thursday “Having loved his own who were in the world, Jesus loved them to the end” (John 13) I cried and then pondered what it could mean for Jesus to command the same love from us when He said “Love as I have loved you”. It was with a sense of finality Jesus was left in the tomb on Friday evening, the stone rolled tight, the stone that would shut Jesus off from all He loved, from life itself. Then today, what joy, what hope. Jesus was not abandoned. No need to fear. We meet a young man in the tomb who says “Do not be afraid: you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth. He is not here. He has been raised.” Alleluia.

What a powerful story. It is the hope on which our faith as Christians is built. Jesus is not just another teacher, not just another religious hero. Jesus is God himself. He has power over everything even death.

That faith, that belief is our Easter belief. It is the belief that brings hope to each funeral service we celebrate. We can say with confidence that death, the

departure from this earthly life is not the end. It is just the beginning of a new and different existence. It is why I once told someone I would rather do a burial, funeral service than any other. For me each burial is an Easter celebration. It is an opportunity to celebrate not only a person's life, but also the hope of resurrection. Sorting through my paper work the other day, I ran across the funeral sermons I have done through the years. There are more of them than I thought. Each one holds a capsule, an essence, of a loved one, a celebration. Tied closely to that celebration is the hope of resurrection, the hope Jesus gives to his disciples in those last hours before his arrest and crucifixion when he says in John "See I am going to prepare a place for you, that where I am, there you may be also" As I have said so many times, I do not know what that "place" looks like. We each may have our own vision, but for all of us it goes beyond the realm of human imagination.

What I do know is Jesus promises that to everyone. With His resurrection he guarantees a universal possibility. Years ago, I buried a man who never stepped foot in a church, who said to me the first time I met him "you know, I am not a praying man". He called me one night and said, "Pray with me" and we prayed over the phone. What he meant to say was I am not a church-going man. I have buried cradle Episcopalians who sat in the same pew each Sunday, who never missed church even on vacation, who at the altar, when I said, "the body of Christ" responded with a firm voice "Amen", whose day to day faith was part of their identity. I buried a man who only months before his death came to me and said, "I want to be baptized". I buried a lifelong Episcopalian, a mentor to many of us, who sat on his back porch with me and said, "What if what I have believed all my life is not true?", who expressed his fear of dying. I sat and prayed with a dying woman at Maine Med who said "I ain't got no religion", who told me of her anger toward God over the death of a son, who did not want to talk with me, who told me to leave her room. Each day I sat by her bedside until finally she said, "Can you find that poem "Footprints"? That's the poem that talks about Jesus walking beside us. No matter what the circumstance, no matter the

shape of a person's life of faith, the length of their time of faith, the message is always the same. God's arms are always open. Jesus has gone ahead to prepare a place for all. Life as we know it may be over, but death does not hold the power. As St. Paul says "O death where is thy sting. O grave thy victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:55) In His resurrection Jesus has the power, power He shares with us.

Here is what else I believe; Jesus did not just come to bring power over death, that physical end of life on earth, He came to bring power TO life, to every single day. If he did not, why would He have spent his ministry teaching and talking, walking and weeping, helping and healing, dealing with the realities of life. His ministry was not a flash in the pan, one-time appearance. His life was a full immersion in humanity, into what it meant to be human. His life and love was a message in how to live, how to deal with those daily deaths each and every one of us face - the death of a relationship, the death of physical ability and health, the death of a possibilities, the death of mental capabilities, the death of the dream for a peaceful world, the death of our dreams for our country, the death of what was. All those things that seem dead to us. Jesus comes to each and every one of these daily deaths, and brings resurrection, brings hope. He brings life.

In the book of John Jesus says, "I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10) That abundant life is not just life after death, but life from the time of birth, the life we live each day. We can start each and every day with the knowledge of the resurrection. We can pick up the pieces, put the past behind us, and begin each new day fresh with possibilities. We can rise up. We can rise up as new people, changed people who have met life and death head on. As Christians we begin each new day emboldened with that power that comes from Jesus' resurrection. If every burial is a celebration, a mini-Easter, then every single day is indeed a celebration of new life, new possibilities, a mini-Easter as well. In that life, we live as Jesus calls us to live, as people who love as

Jesus loved, who have been shaped by Jesus' love. That is remarkable. Gone are greed and selfishness. Gone are dread and despair. Gone are hatred and contempt. Gone are lies and deceit. In their place are love and acceptance, hope and possibility, truth and justice. We arrive at the place God calls us to be. We arrive at Easter.

Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.