

Comes the Dawn ~ Easter: April 23, 2008
Matthew 28:1-10; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Here we are on the first Sunday following the first full moon on or after the vernal equinox. As we left church on Maundy Thursday, the first day of spring, the full moon brightened the sky above us. Spring has officially sprung and here we are in its chilly glory.

It is Easter, once again, and we have gathered in this place amidst the flowers and the emotions of the day to hear the story of the resurrection of Jesus. We have come to share the joy this event brings us and to wonder at what it was that happened so many years ago.

The accounts of this mystery are found in our gospels-- the “good news” of the life and teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus. We gather here because we want to be reminded that the promise of his life is also the promise of ours. This life is not all there is, we journey on beyond where we are and who we are now.

We do not know exactly what took place so long ago, on that first Easter, but we know that something did happen. There was some event that cemented a group of frightened people together with a bond that withstood difficult times. The early followers became united in the purpose of sharing what they had learned with all who would listen. That is how the story of Jesus spread—one person at a time—slowly but surely taking root and spreading its branches throughout all the world. It truly is an incredible story that overcame all odds.

It all started with the dawn coming and the women going to the tomb. They had probably spent a difficult time following the crucifixion of one they held so dear, and they probably were discussing who would do what in preparing the body for a proper burial. That was the task at hand. There had been no time before the Sabbath began to handle what was required.

Matthew tells us they went to “see” the tomb and were startled when there was an earthquake and the appearance of an angel rolling the stone from the tomb’s entrance.

Our reading is full of the verb “see.” The women had come to “see,” the angel invited them to “see” the interior of the empty tomb and told them they would “see” Jesus in Galilee. Then Jesus himself appeared to them as they ran to tell the disciples what had taken place. Jesus told them that they would “see” him later. And, so, they did. Their eyes were opened and the dawn came into their hearts and souls and they finally saw what he had been about all along.

We may take great comfort in their slow awakening because we, too, are slow to wake up to the “good news” and truly see what Jesus was all about and what it is we are meant to be all about as his followers. After all, they were close up and personal and they did not understand the full meaning of his message. Is it any wonder that we, standing behind layers of centuries, do not always grasp what he was about and do not always understand the wonderful story that unfolds before us as we study and ponder his life? Too often we become bound up in our need for scientific evidence to proceed on faith. Too often we are tied by church dogma and doctrine that has nothing to do with the wonder of the story. When we manage to free ourselves from all the stuff that has weighed down the

beautiful story of his life and his passage to the next level of life, we find ourselves enchanted by what will be our future, also.

I cannot tell you exactly what it is that we will find as we journey beyond this life. But I firmly believe our souls do go on. I have no doubt about it. This is because I have been raised as a Christian and I believe in a kind and loving God who only wants the very best for God's creatures. I do not believe that we are meant to grow in knowledge and wisdom during this earthly life and have it come to nothing. There is always something more for us both in this world and in the next.

We need to move forward with courage and a sense that we are held up by our God, even as was Christ. We are sustained through the dark Holy Weeks of our existence to come to a bright and new way of living. We are nurtured as we go through life by the understanding we have of the message that was sent to us through God's son. We need to realize that we, too, are the beloved sons and daughters of God and that we bear the same message of love and hope and joy and forgiveness and understanding and patience to all who are around us. We need to remind ourselves on this day and on all days that, "Made like him like him we rise, . . . , ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia."

To go to the next level of life, we must bear many things—some things that sometimes seem unbearable. We have heard it said, that, "We all have our crosses to bear." We do. They are differing sizes and varying weights. My crosses are not the same as yours. Some trail after us for short periods of time, others seem to bump along behind us for ages. But there comes a time, when they disappear and we are set free to grow beyond all that has held us back.

That is what this day is all about—the freedom we will have when we no longer carry the world's burdens with us. It is a time of celebration—a time of resurrection to a new way of life and a new way of thinking.

Every Sunday is meant to be a celebration of Easter. It is meant to be a time when we look forward to the promise that awaits us. It is the time when we stop for a moment and catch a fleeting glimpse of the One who has gone on before us to show us the way. When comes the dawn, we will finally see clearly what we see only dimly now.

-- Amen