

The First Reading is Isaiah 65:17-25

¹⁷ ***For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;***

the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.

¹⁸ But ***be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating;***

for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and ***its people as a delight.***

¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and ***delight in my people;***

no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.

²⁰ No more shall there be in it
an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

²¹ They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

²² They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

²³ They shall not labor in vain,
or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—
and their descendants as well.

²⁴ Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.

²⁵ The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
***They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,*** says the Lord.

The Second Reading is the Gospel of Luke 24:1-12

¹ But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴ While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵ The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ***“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.*** ⁶ Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of

Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.”⁸ **Then they remembered** his words,⁹ and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.¹⁰ Now it was **Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women** with them who told this to the apostles.¹¹ But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.¹² But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

The Message is entitled, *Aliveness in the Wilderness*

Can we imagine this new creation that the prophet Isaiah spoke of where no one will hurt or destroy on God’s holy mountain or anywhere else? Can we imagine a world with no more weeping or cries of distress? Can we imagine a world where the predator and the prey will eat together at table and be at peace with one another? O for such a world, where God takes delight in us and we take delight in God!

Yet, the world around us is far from this dream. It seems at times like the endless wilderness that the people of God wandered through for forty years, as chronicled in the Book of Exodus. As this congregation sojourned from Ash Wednesday to this glorious morning, we allowed the story of God’s people in Exodus to inform our journey. We discovered that the wilderness is not only a physical place, like the wilderness of Sinai, but also a metaphor for places and times in our life, and in our world when the trajectory of things change dramatically. The wilderness can be a time of uncertain transition or upheaval, a time of birthing something new or having to let go. The wilderness of fear took root in the lives of Jesus’ followers after they shared a meal together, as Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. This wilderness of fear led to denial and betrayal among his twelve. This wilderness of fear led the women to the foot of the cross and to his tomb.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?” The women, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women, were perplexed and terrified in the face of this question, for they were not looking for the living, they were looking for the dead. They expected the body of Jesus to be where they had seen it laid on Friday before sundown. These women, who had come with Jesus from Galilee, had witnessed everything, his healing and teaching ministry as well as his final suffering and death. They saw Joseph of Arimathea claim the body of Jesus and they followed him to a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. They saw the linen-wrapped body be placed there and then a large stone rolled across the tomb’s entrance. They returned from the tomb to prepare spices and anointment, but rested on the Sabbath, as was their custom. Yet, as the dawn of the first day of the week took flight they came to prepare Jesus’ body for its proper burial, for they knew what needed to be done.

This Easter morn, I wonder, do we know what needs to be done? In this wilderness world where death seems so prevalent and real, do we know what needs to be done?

This question brings to mind a man I never met, his name was Steve Hayner. At the time of his diagnosis of pancreatic cancer he was the president of Columbia Theological Seminary. I

knew of Steve given that I received a grant through Columbia Theological Seminary to travel to Israel in 2009. And through my connection to the seminary, I was introduced to Steve and his wife Sharol as they shared their journey together through the wilderness of pancreatic cancer using a Caring Bridge blog. Although his site has been deactivated, their blog exemplified for me what needs to be done in a world where death is still very real. Steve faced his unwanted wilderness saying, "We have eternal life NOW, not only as an expectation for the future." His words continued, "And my 'in your face' reminder of the nature of our broken world has reminded me that this eternal life is God's story of love, hope, forgiveness, reconciliation and joy [NOW]." Even in the wilderness of pancreatic cancer, Steve was a fully alive human being present to God's story.

What needs to be done this Easter is that you and I need to recommit to embodying God's story of love, hope, forgiveness, reconciliation and joy with our very lives. Not just today on this glorious day, but tomorrow and the next day and the next.

The two dazzling, divine individuals said to the women, "Remember how Jesus told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Remember?

Do you know what needs to be remembered? We need to remember our story of faith from the beginning, to the exodus, to the miraculous birth, to the cross and the empty tomb. We need to remember that with Christ's ascension we are Christ's body on earth today. As Keith Giles writes, "We, you and you and I, are the physical representation of Jesus in the world today!"

The fog of grief momentarily lifted as the women remembered what Jesus had said to them not once, but three times in Galilee. They remembered that he said he would die, but then he would rise. At the empty tomb they remembered this and went to tell all that they had seen to the eleven. The women, the ones faithful even in the face of death, the ones who knew what needed to be done, were the ones who first expressed the truth of the resurrection. Christ is alive!

Easter Sunday is always such a glorious celebration, for we gather to declare Christ is alive. The women didn't find the body of Jesus wrapped in linen clothes in a rock-hewn tomb. For as Apostle Paul declared to the church at Corinth, "Death has been swallowed up in victory." The resurrection, we gather to celebrate today, boldly declares that not death, not situations or places of deadness, not places of seemingly endless wilderness, but life, yes life has the final word!

Yet, is there evidence in our lives that Jesus is alive? Do our actions in this wilderness world bear witness to Christ risen? Is Christ alive in us?

This brings to mind a woman named Gayle Knight, for Christ is alive he her. She creates a new beginning for mom's and children who are struggling. Christ alive in her began simply, as she took under her wing one homeless mom and child. From this humble beginning her passion for embodying God's love has grown into a non-profit that turns despair into hope for abandoned and abused women and children. Countless women have experienced new beginnings and their children have relearned how to smile, laugh and learn, and even to dream

dreams of achieving a college education never thought possible thanks to scholarships provided through her organization. Gayle tells her story to anyone who will listen, but even more importantly she embodies Christ alive, Christ's story through her self-emptying acts of turning despair into hope.

"But the words of the women seemed to the disciples like idle tale." I am sure many of us know how frustrating it is to not be taken seriously, for it has probably happened to us at one point or another in our lives. What's really frustrating though, is if our stories are discounted simply because of who we are, whether it is because of our age or gender, our status or ethnicity, our socio-economic status or educational level. In first century Palestine, women were not considered credible witnesses, yet that is who God chose to first bear witness to the resurrection.

God chooses unlikely witnesses to embody the truth of the resurrection today as well, for God chooses even us! We, too, will face skepticism as we embody Christ alive in us. People will suspect our motives and challenge our beliefs. We will face other skeptics as well because some Christ followers do not always act as a living Jesus would. Christ followers in this country have been known to be exclusionary and judgmental, with a lack of compassion and love. Our story of faith in this particular country is littered with the wilderness of genocide, slavery, racism, sexism, ageism and any other "ism" you can think of. When we, as the gathered Body of Christ do not act as a living Jesus would, then we do not embody Christ is alive, we simply testify that he died.

I wonder, this Easter morn do we know what needs to be done? Do we know what needs to be remembered this day in the face of the skepticism and disbelief we will experience as followers of the risen Christ?

God said through the prophet Isaiah, "I am about to create new heavens and a new earth." Are we ready to be a part of God's new creation in the eternal now? As Richard Rohr says, "Jesus came as a human being to teach us how to be a fully alive human being here on earth." Let us be fully alive just as the living Jesus was among us. Let us remember anew this Easter that life, and not death, has the final word and that eternity with God begins today as we embody the heart and mind of Christ with our very lives. In this new creation we are to be God's delight. Let us embody the transformative power of the risen Christ through our daily words and actions, by living faithfully and fearlessly the heart and mind of Christ, for Christ is alive in us! Amen. Amen!