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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

April 17, 2022

Easter Day, Year C, Revised Common Lectionary

[Isaiah 65:17-25](#)

[Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24](#)

[Acts 10:34-43](#)

[John 20:1-18](#)

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and on those in the tombs bestowing life!

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Two weeks ago my six-year-old and I were talking about the colors of the hangings in church: the deep purple that was up then during Lent, the red and black about to be put up for Holy Week. What color would it be for Easter, she asked? White, I said. And she said, “Boring! Easter should be rainbow colors. After all, Easter eggs are lots of different colors.”

She gave me permission to tell that story, which I think has a lot of wisdom in it, and which actually echoes one of the stories about the origins of the first Easter eggs. The legend goes that Mary Magdalene, on her visit to the tomb, was carrying a basket of eggs to share with the other women. When she met the risen Jesus, the eggs in her basket miraculously turned all the colors of the rainbow.

There are other variations of the story where the eggs all turn red, or where Mary goes as a missionary to Rome and meets Caesar who scoffs at her and says, “A man could no more rise from the dead than that egg in your hand can turn red.” And so of course at that moment so it does. Whatever version of the story you like, Mary Magdalene is closely associated with the symbol of an egg. When you see an icon of Mary Magdalene she’ll likely be holding one. And that’s fitting because Mary Magdalene is the first witness to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead; Jesus, whom death couldn’t hold captive, who breaks from its grip into new life, the tomb cracked open, death itself cracked open and lying at his feet like a broken shell.

Mary Magdalene is known as the Apostle to the Apostles: the first witness, the one who first shared the good news with everyone else. It matters that the first apostle is a woman, someone her society sees as less than, someone whose testimony wouldn’t be accepted in court. One of the other gospels says that when she first told the news to the male disciples they thought it was, quote, an “idle tale.” Mary knew what it was to be laughed at and disbelieved by men. And in that way she stands in solidarity with the whole rainbow of God’s children who might be on the margins in their own places and times, with everyone whose experience and testimony gets written off by others and who nonetheless holds fast to the truth as they know it. It matters that Jesus appears first to Mary, and not only appears to her, but calls her by name. “Mary,” he says, and in that moment she sees him, she knows him, because she is known by him.

Probably the most beautiful Easter eggs in the world are the ones from Ukraine called pysanky. They're intricately patterned, made in a painstaking process of dying the egg a lighter color, then covering the parts of it with wax that will stay that color, then dying it the next slightly darker color and covering those parts of it with wax, and so on. As a teenager I remember being shown how to make one by the mother of a classmate, heating up the stylus to melt the wax, then waiting until it dried to bathe it again in the dye. This Easter those Ukrainian pysanky have taken on a new meaning, a sign not just of Easter joy but also of the yearning for hope and peace and freedom in the midst of profound devastation.

War is an experience that's very close to the mystery of Holy Week. We have journeyed through that mystery in the last three days: the experience of trauma, of betrayal, of violence, of death that comes too soon and suddenly. The experience of lament. In Holy Week we come close to God's taking on of all our human nature, including our sorrow. And at Easter we come close to God's triumph over Easter, a triumph that gives us hope and assurance of God's love and presence even in the midst of despair.

The sacrament that joins us with Jesus in his dying and rising is Holy Baptism. And this morning we are celebrating the baptism of the two newest members of the Body of Christ. When we go down into the waters we are joined with Jesus. We are dipped in the baptismal waters like an egg and dyed with the life of Jesus. And there's no layer of wax to keep any part of us from him. We are stained with him and coated with him, in his risen life, his immortality, his love. His life clings to us forever. Today Richard and Marilyn will take on that life.

In Ukraine you might give pysanky to friends, to children, to neighbors. You might also keep a blessed pysanka in your home the way you might keep a blessed palm cross or a little holy water, as a sign of God's presence. And traditionally if a loved one died, you might tuck a pysanka into the coffin as a farewell blessing. There may be pysanky being tucked into coffins today by grieving loved ones, just as Mary hoped to tend to the lifeless body of Jesus. Jesus today is there: in Ukraine, and wherever God's children are grieving. And he offers hope. Not a cheap hope that says don't worry, everything will be okay. Because sometimes it won't. What Jesus offers is a deeper hope that says that even when everything is as far from okay as it can possibly be, God's love can never be defeated, and God holds us in that love even through the power of death itself.

Jesus Christ is risen. Mary was the first witness but not the last. Through twenty centuries his friends have been meeting him and discovering their lives transformed. Today Jesus is here in this place to meet you. He is saying your name. Whoever you are in the incredible rainbow of God's children. Whatever it is that brought you here today. Whether it's a vibrant faith or a deep conflicted yearning, whether it's joyful music or childhood memory or just because a loved one dragged you here, whoever you are, Jesus loves you and he offers you his own life, a life that has known the worst of the power of death, and can never die.

Alleluia: Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed: alleluia.

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