

Ever-Present Love; Unexpected Moments

Sermon delivered by The Very Rev. Matt Rhodes
at Christ Church and Old Chapel, Millwood, Virginia
Easter Sunday, April 21, 2019

In the name of one God: creator; redeemer; and sustainer. Amen.

How do you feel when you go somewhere and anticipate finding things a certain way ... only to discover that they are not at all how you thought you would find them?

You visit a church expecting one type of service and instead walk into a different type altogether. You drive back to your hometown to look at the house in which you were raised or visit the old elementary school and find that they have been torn down. You head out to surprise a friend you have not seen in years only to discover that they have moved.

In these and I am sure countless other examples, you might experience any of a number of emotions: sadness; disappointment; surprise; amazement.

One week ago, in my homily for Palm Sunday, I encouraged everyone to try and follow the full arc of this Holy Week and to put themselves within the stories and readings of each day ... to try and experience what those in the Gospel readings were feeling, and seeing, and hearing. This morning, I want to offer that invitation once more. This time, I want you to put yourselves in the place of those who came to the tomb of Jesus on that first Easter morning – those who came for one thing and found something else entirely. As you reflect on the resurrection, how would you feel ... how do you feel ... when you place yourself before the empty tomb?

They undoubtedly set out that morning expecting only to find their friend ... their teacher ... their Messiah ... in the same place where he been left after being gently lifted down from the cross and carried to the tomb a few days earlier. They likely never thought there would be an interruption to their grief. There was certainly no indication that the unchecked sorrow weighing them down would dissipate.

And yet what was seen was not at all what they expected to find. They anticipated a stone needing to be moved so that the body could be tended; they found instead the stone rolled away and the body ... gone. In Luke's Gospel, we read that they were perplexed by what they saw; in the version in John's Gospel, they did not understand what they were seeing ... or, to take it in a slightly different direction, they were confused by what they were not seeing.

I do wonder, too, as they were feeling perplexed and not understanding, if they were feeling ... if they were sensing ... love?

Throughout this Holy Week, in each of my homilies and meditations, I have been talking about the power and presence of love. The love of Jesus that was present at the final meal with his

disciples, a love for them and a love he commanded them to share. The powerful love that was present at the time of his death, not only at the **foot** of the cross but **on** the cross during those final hours. And now, on this Easter morning, the love that had been present throughout the week was revealed in the most magnificent way of all.

It was an incredible love that Jesus demonstrated in dying on the cross for the redemption of the world ... and now, it was that same love, **indescribable** and **powerful**, that conquered death and the grave and was the driving force behind the glorious resurrection.

This love ... the love of God that binds him to the Son ... the love of God that is at the heart of all creation and the reason **we** are **here** ... does something incredible. It **reversed things**; in the words of C. S. Lewis, resurrection involved "a series of changes moving in the opposite direction to those we see."¹ It was a love that led God to raise "one man (the man who was Himself) from the dead because He will one day raise all men from the dead."² Those who were there at the cross ... those who laid him in the tomb ... saw things moving in one direction: the direction of death, and separation. The plan of God was not visible, and it was that plan ... already moving things in the opposite direction from what the disciples and friends of Jesus saw ... that was put in place: the plan of resurrection and unification.

The resurrection that has been promised to us **all**.

But before that day of the **great** resurrection, I ask this: where do you see the moments of resurrection in your lives ... **now**? Do you experience moments when you approach something in life ... something that feels deep inside as cold as a tomb ... something from which you may sense separation or isolation by a heavy stone of this world ... and discover instead that stone is gone and the expected cold is instead incredible warmth?

Look for those moments, great and small, each day ... those times when you may expect one thing and find something different ... something even more incredible. When you find them, **hold fast** to them. **Embrace** them. **Cherish** them. For those incredible moments ... those instances of resurrection ... are the powerful, visible and overwhelming signs of love. The love that God shared with Jesus. The love that Jesus shared with the disciples. The love the disciples were commanded to show. The love that was present at the cross. The love that defeated death.

That love ... **God's** love ... **resurrection** love ... is given **for you**.

Amen.

¹ C. S. Lewis. "Miracles," from *God in the Dock*. https://just84465.weebly.com/uploads/5/0/5/9/50596861/god_in_the_dock.pdf

² Ibid.