



April 24, 2022 – The Second Sunday of Easter

The Hope of Resurrection in Creation

The Reverend Nick Morris-Kliment

Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA

Oh Lord: may Your Word only be spoken; and may Your Word only be heard: In the Name of Jesus Christ, the Living Word. Amen.

Alleluia, Christ is Risen!

It is the second Sunday of the Easter Season, a 50-day-season. No other season except Ordinary Time, and sometimes, the Season of Epiphany, is as long. This makes sense, as it gives us more time to specifically ponder the stupendous event that we celebrated last Sunday. Once the fumes of the Easter eruption have dissipated, we may find ourselves asking ourselves, and God, “Where has that Resurrection Power gone? Where is it in my life? Why is it business as usual, life as usual?”

It turns out that maybe experiencing Resurrection power may take some practice. In a significant way, we prepare to experience Resurrection every Sunday, whether we realize it or not. Simply by gathering here, right now, (in front of our computer) whether we feel like being here or not, and when we could easily, easily, have slept in, scrolled through an online version of the newspaper, or read an actual paper, we offer ourselves to the Resurrected Jesus—who is present here in the community, in the songs and silence, in the prayers and Scripture, perhaps even in this homily, in the Eucharist, in the fellowship, in the outreach to one another and the world.

When we show up, like Thomas does, we place ourselves in the position to experience Jesus. Like Thomas, we keep gathering with other people who believe, or want to believe, or have decided, at least for today, to live like they believe, to live like we have been witnesses to Resurrection, so that we may offer Resurrection life to others. As the line in the Nicene Creed puts it: We look for the Resurrection of dead. Being here, now, is a start.

You may know that this is Earth Day weekend; we marked the 52nd Earth Day this past Friday. It also happens that earlier this month, beneath the news avalanche caused by the war in Ukraine, the United Nation’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released a sobering report that we may have missed the window for to keep global temperatures from rising more than 1.5 degrees Celsius. https://www.cnbc.com/2022/04/04/ipcc-report-climate-scientists-issue-ultimatum-on-1point5-degrees-goal.html?_source=OTS%7Cfinance%7Cinline%7Cstory%7C&par=OTS&doc=107043430

Will it be a permanent Good Friday for human habitation on our planet?

So, I wanted to reflect for a bit on how practicing paying attention to the gift of God’s creation can make the power of the Resurrection present in a way that energizes us for love and ministry.

First: yesterday, we buried kind and wonderful Jane Mentzer, a faithful member of this Parish for six decades. And we laid her ashes to rest in our Sanctuary Garden. Our Sanctuary Garden is a wonder. Just a month or two ago, the garden seemed lifeless. Brown. Not much to look at. Not much to celebrate.



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And now, coming up through what was apparently barren earth, there are little green arrows, hundreds of them, shot as if from a subterranean bow, unfurling their brilliantly green leaves. To me it's a reminder of the irrepressible power of God to create all things new. That power that raised Jesus from the dead—the power will bring Jane, and all of us alive again, on the last day—makes all things new.

Second: I learned the other day that there are ancient trees here in New England. A bit of background. History tells us that huge stretches of old growth, ancient trees, were cut down throughout the centuries in New England. And in fact, for most of the 20th century, it was accepted as established fact, that the ancient forests of New England had completely succumbed to industrious and rapacious settlers who had cut, sawed, and pulled up trees for fuel to burn, timber to build, and land to farm. And, this thinking goes, that while there were a few individual trees that survived the assault of settlers (like the 400-year-old Endicott pear tree in Danvers) the whole industry complex of environmental PhDs and forest managers had been convinced that there was no old-growth forest left. And by old growth, what is meant is multispecies ecosystems with trees that have been left alone for at least 150 years.

It turns out that there *are* old trees in New England. In western Massachusetts, in the Mohawk Trail State Forest, there are multi-species ecosystems, with trees over 150 years old. Representing this surprising and glorious truth is a grove of the so-called Peace Trees, named by the Native peoples who had honored them. They create an environment that can only be called sacred. They call forth a sense of deep time, of God's time. People meeting there experience a kind of church. And as far as the climate is concerned, it also turns out that old trees are even more marvelous at capturing harmful greenhouse gasses than vigorous young trees. In God's economy, even old life brings new life. (Jonny Diamond, "The Old Man and the Tree," *Smithsonian Magazine*, Vol 52, no. 9, January/February 2022, pp. 33)

Finally, I came across another story about trees that gives me Resurrection hope. Midway through the last century, a uniquely massive mahogany tree was felled in the jungle of what is now Belize in Central America. Exploitative timber speculators had believed that they could make a killing by harvesting this tree. They managed to bring it down. But the jungle was so dense, it defeated the human ability to drag it out. And it lay there for years, a legendary, holy grail of timber. It was known simple as "the Tree."

But a creative and resourceful man figured a way to get it out of the forest, by sawing into smaller pieces, and finally bringing out. It turns out that the wood of this tree is uniquely magnificent, the grain and the coloring are astonishing, and greatly desirable. And so, this limited amount of wood is in great demand. While it has ended up as paneling in wealthy peoples' parlors, and in beautiful furniture, what is most life-giving in my mind, is that it has been made into luscious guitars, making music that gives pleasure to the eye, and sustenance and delight to the soul. What had been a kind of corpse in the forest, had been transformed into instruments of joy and harmony and sent all over the world. (Ellen Ruppel Shell, "The Legend of the Music Tree," *Smithsonian Magazine*, Vol. 53, 01, April/May 2022, pp. 104)



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For me, the power and love that raised Jesus from the dead, manifests itself in these ways, not only in these ways, but definitely, in these ways. The pattern of Resurrection is *everywhere*.

In a moment, we will recall in Eucharistic Prayer C that at God’s command, “all things came to be....including this fragile earth, our island home.” Paying attention to the wonder of God’s creation makes present the power of the Resurrection. And so, we cherish the natural world and nurture it back to health, protecting it, honoring it, stewarding it. The natural world reassures me of God’s power to bring about new life in the face of death. No matter what we face, and we face a lot, the Resurrection power and love of God can guide us through.

Amen.