

## The Bishop's Easter Message – 2009

Alleluia! Christ is risen. The lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

As a (very) young priest I preached an Easter sermon on the resurrection of Jesus. My main point was how, through Jesus' resurrection, God makes the gift of new and eternal life to sinful humans and to a broken world. As I remember the sermon, I went on to talk about Jesus' resurrection as the first installment of God's new creation (I Corinthians 15) in which all is reconciled, healed, restored, forgiven and in which all people will have a place. Granted, this was a lot to say in one sermon, but it is not an uncommon pitfall for a new priest (yes, and some old ones as well...). In any event the sermon was, I thought, a fairly standard recitation of the Gospel witness to the resurrection and some of what we can grasp of the mystery of Jesus' resurrection. (And by "mystery" I do not mean that the resurrection is like a scientific reality to be solved, but rather a reality that is divinely rooted in God's love and so vast that our mortal, finite minds can never grasp the reality in its fullness; and yet, through God's mercy, we can participate in the mystery and rejoice in its promise as we grow in our experience of it both in this life and throughout eternity.)

Much to my surprise, a few days after my Easter sermon, a parishioner wrote a long and complaining letter about the sermon. In the letter, she referred to the "...radical new re-interpretation of Christian doctrine being taught in seminary these days and how sermons like this one were subverting the traditional faith of the Church." The writer and I had many conversations about all this and remained good friends until her death a few years ago. (I look forward to our friendship continuing in eternity, thanks to the gift of Jesus' resurrection!)

In this story, there is both a call and a message. The call is rooted in the sad story that the person who wrote the complaining letter had been underserved by her church in terms of Christian Formation. Intentional Christian Formation (or Christian Education as it used to be called) from early childhood through old age is a ministry of the Church that is crucial in equipping the saints (Ephesians 4:12) for ministry and hopeful living in a society that grows ever more confusingly complex. Therefore, I call on every congregation in our diocese, every ordained person and every vestry to strengthen and provide offerings for persons of all ages in the area of Christian Formation. "But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?" (Romans 10:14) In this Easter season, God bless all those who serve as leaders and teachers in Christian Formation!

One message in all this is that the resurrection of Jesus is the proclamation that God works beyond our feeble human capacity to understand and beyond all human categories of inclusion and exclusion that we can devise in our sinfulness. God's new creation inaugurated by the resurrection of Jesus is about justice for all, liberation, healing, restoration, reconciliation and eternal life. Jesus' resurrection frees us from our sins of the past, proclaims that our future is secure in him and frees us to live with hope and strength in the present.

As Christians, we participate in Jesus' resurrection not only through hearing God's word and receiving God's sacraments; we also participate in Jesus' resurrection by working for justice, resisting evil, striving for reconciliation, being peacemakers, feeding the hungry, liberating the oppressed and respecting the dignity of every human being. (The Book of Common Prayer, The Baptismal Covenant, pages 304–305) The Baptismal vows point to the concrete actions we are called to take in this world as citizens of a new creation and a new society established by Jesus' resurrection. We don't know what the new creation envisioned by God and the new society established by Jesus' resurrection is going to look like in its entirety...that's a mystery. But we are assured that through our baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus that we are part of that new society and that the resurrection society established by Jesus will include justice and mercy and forgiveness and healing and peace.

Alleluia! Let us live as strong and bold witnesses in the present to the Lord who through his resurrection brings new life to the world and its people. Alleluia!