

Within the last two weeks:

~a man brimming with hate opened fire and kills 3 innocent people he did not know.

~a 31 year old woman finds another new malignant tumor in her lung...

~ a ferry sinks in frigid ocean water drowning hundreds of high school students...

The world is full of sorrow...you don't need me to tell you this....

and yet...here we stand on Easter Sunday Morning...in this beautiful garden!

the woods just starting to bloom after a long, hard winter...

birds are chirping...

the breeze is gentle and soft...

the sun is rising...

and we proclaim the Scripture story of the Resurrection of Jesus the Christ...

What do we do with all of this: the terror and the beauty??

What real difference does this Holy Day,

this Easter Morning,

make in our lives with all of its pain and with all of its joy?

Sometimes I wonder, why most of us, on some level

think that believing in God and in Jesus, by being good and kind

is somehow supposed to protect us from the fragility and messiness of life...

It obviously doesn't...

So why did we get up early on a Sunday morning to sing and to pray?

Why do we celebrate the Resurrection of the Christ...

Those are good questions to ask yourself....

I would encourage to ponder and pray about them sometime today...

But for right now, I will share with you why I got up early this morning....

To be honest with you, over the years....

I have come to know, not in my head, but in my heart and in my bones....

that there is, there really is, an amazing,

wondrous,

kind,

loving,

strong,

yet mysterious

Presence -in the universe-

that is always and every where,

available to everyone all of the time.

This Presence doesn't not belong to anyone but to everyone.

This Divine Mystery can not be bought, sold, or commanded...

This Holy Love is the ground in which we are rooted, it is the air that we breathe and it is the Light that illumines the way....

This Divine Grace will not protect us from the limitations and fragility of human existence...

my goodness...it did not protect Jesus from the cross...

but it will, it absolutely, undeniably will, give us all the courage, the comfort,

the peace, the strength, the wisdom to deal with whatever life brings our way....

We, though, must be open and willing!

We must let go of our predetermined expectations...

we must be willing to present, here and now to what is actually happening in this very moment...not lost in the past or the future...

We must be willing to allow grace to soften our broken, hurt and harden hearts, to let the Love of the Holy One grow new life in us and through us.

These were the teachings of Jesus and they are what he gave his life for....

They are what we celebrate this day.

**Now you might think we are celebrating Jesus' resurrection
that happened over 2,000 years ago.**

On one level, you are right...yes we are....

but even on a deeper level,

we are celebrating what is happening today, in our lives, in our world...

in our hearts.

**What happened so long ago in Jerusalem, is a both a mystery and a testimony
to the truth of the life of Jesus.**

**It is a mystery, because they could not, nor can we,
prove the bodily Resurrection of Jesus.**

An empty tomb does not prove that he rose from the dead.

**The reason the ancient peoples proclaimed that he still lived, that he rose to new life,
was that they experienced his Presence in their lives and,
even more so, in their hearts.**

**They experienced a Power and a Grace that gave them courage and peace
beyond their understanding....**

They felt a shift in the way they experienced the struggles of their lives.

**The early followers of Jesus were no stranger to hunger, to injustice, to violence,
to persecutions, to poverty, to sorrow...**

**Yet, yet.... they had these encounters with this Presence that, according to our story, was
terrifying and perplexing and amazing...**

If you read a little bit further in Luke's Gospel you will hear,
that it was their hearts, not their eyes,
that told them it he still lived.

It was THEIR experience_of his Presence that they have passed on to us.
Not so that we would believe their word for it...
but as an invitation to experience, for ourselves,
that he still lives .

So how in the world are we to do *THAT???*

There are a couple of things we need to do, to set the stage,
so that we might have an experience of the Risen Christ in our lives...

Number one: we must say Yes!
we must be willing to be open to Christ's presence and grace...
If we aren't willing to see...we won't!

Number two: we must be willing to let go of a lot of stuff! We must be willing to let go of
our preconceived notions of where God is to be found and how God is supposed to show up.
We must be willing to let go of our opinions of ourselves as not being good enough or
worthy enough for God to love...

Number three: we must be willing to pause and listen with the ears of our hearts and to
trust that our Yes has been heard, and... in the space left by all of that letting go....
we will find the stirrings of Holy Love deep within ...

Perhaps we might experience a subtle graciousness,
perhaps a powerful energy...perhaps we will find new courage,
new patience,
or over looked joy,

Perhaps we will discover just the simple presence of profound peace.

THIS, these discoveries... are the Risen Christ.

So...here is what I would like to do...

**I will be silent for 15 seconds or so and I'm going to invite you
close your eyes or if you are more comfortable...keep them open...**

**Listen to the birds, smell the blossoming forest, feel the breeze on your cheek...
relax your shoulders...relax your jaw...Soften your heart,
breathe deeply...2 times...**

and if you are willing:

say YES! to wonder,

to courage, to joy, to kindness, to forgiveness,

to compassion, to mercy, to peace ... to Love...

say Yes to the Power, the Presence of the Risen One, Jesus the Christ...

who is here, right now in this garden.

(silence)

We celebrate Easter, the Presence of the Risen Christ,

not because of ancient stories or because of other people's experiences...

We celebrate Easter this morning

because we are willing to experience for our selves

the Power of Love...

We say 'Yes' to Presence of the Risen Christ...

We celebrate Easter this morning

**not because our lives are turning out the way we want them too...
but because in the face of all the turmoil and struggles of the world
the Presence of the Risen Christ shows us that death
is nothing but a doorway into New Life...**

And so, as we celebrate Easter this morning:

Let us sing with joyful hearts: ALLELUIA, ALLELUIA!

and let us whisper with grateful hearts...thank you!

Amen.