

Sermon, Father William J. Albinger

March 23, 2008

Easter Sunday A 2008

In the Name of our one living God, ever creating, ever loving, and ever sustaining:
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Last Sunday, Palm Sunday, our service opened with Jesus arriving in Jerusalem through the East Gate to the acclaim of his disciples and the mostly poor folk who lived in that part of the city. Another parade was entering the city through the West Gate. The Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, led a column of cavalry and armed soldiers into Jerusalem to ensure there would be no disorder during the Passover holiday.

But trouble there would be. Jesus arrived with a reputation. He was the wonder worker who not only healed the sick and gave sight to the blind but would eat with sinners and gentiles. When challenged on his manner of keeping the Sabbath when he would heal the sick on that day, he always put human compassion, especially for the poor and excluded, ahead of strict observance. On his first day in Jerusalem, he shut down the Temple – the center of religious life and authority – by chasing out the vendors of sin offerings and sacrifices and overturning the tables of the money changers. Worse yet, his teaching that God's house was to be a house for all nations challenged the priests' exclusivism. His teaching that God delighted in doing justice and having mercy not temple sacrifices challenged the whole establishment.

And so they killed him. They thought peace could be bought by the death of an innocent man and the Roman Empire was happy to oblige. That still happens often

enough. But it wasn't to be so this time. No, this time was different. No, this time two women became the first Apostles. They saw something not seen since Moses at Mt. Sinai – the creative power of God as a heavenly being rolled the stone away from the guarded tomb and declared that Jesus who was crucified has been raised.

As a modern holiday, Easter is a dud. Unlike Christmas, with its cute baby and happy new parents, the Easter story isn't all clappy-happy. Instead of new life and an infant, we have the bruised and abused corpse of an innocent man unjustly crucified. No matter how we try to dress it up, the truth is that you cannot separate the cross from the empty tomb. When we try, we end up with cheap grace and a vacuous story.

Easter is more shocking than Good Friday. What are we to make of something that is totally outside of human experience? The Gospels plainly acknowledge that “many doubted”- not just Thomas. Even the authors of the Gospels found it impossible to agree on what happened and they differ on many points – including what Jesus looked like and what Jesus said after the resurrection.

The resurrection, the joyful end of the Easter story resists being rewritten into a lovely fairy tale. Unlike Christmas, it demands a response. Perhaps Christmas is so popular because it asks so little of us. People of other faith traditions and even atheists can accept the general nativity story with little real threat to their world view. But there is no – “Oh, yeah, whatever!” – to the Easter story. If we believe that God raised this Jesus from the dead, then the story has a claim on us. What Jesus taught and how Jesus lived have now become very important.

They have profound implications for the way we live in the world. They have profound spiritual implications about how we view God. We have to accept that God is still involved with Creation. We have to accept that God freely loves and that we, in

turn, are able to freely love God. And if we believe that, we believe not only that there is life after death but that there is new life in life. The implications of Easter are staggering – and a threat to everyone’s world view.

So what do we do with this Resurrected Jesus? I think we are still trying to figure that out. But after 2000 years of trying, I can tell you there are some things we cannot seem to do: We cannot tame Jesus, we cannot tame his message and the story of how he lived and we cannot tame the events that occurred in Jerusalem over 2000 years ago.

In short, after all our best efforts, humanity has been unable to put the living Christ back into the tomb. Here in Lahaina on the most remote islands in the whole world, we still hear the Easter shout: “Christ is Risen - The Lord is Risen indeed!”

And so, I wish each and every one of you a joyous Easter.

Amen.