

Easter Day B 2018
April 1, 2018 :: [Citation here]
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“The Benefits of Easter Sunday.”

I used to think that the main benefit we received from the death and resurrection of Jesus, was a guaranteed spot in heaven.

And I thought that, in part, because of what Jesus said in John 14. His ministry was coming to its conclusion, he knew he would be going away, and he wanted to say something encouraging to his disciples. And what he said was (and I’m paraphrasing):

“Listen, there is plenty of room in my Father’s home. And I’m on my way to get a room ready for each of you. And I will come back and get you, so you can live where I live” (John 14:1-4).

And do you know what? That’s not a bad thing to believe in! That’s not a bad assurance to have – believing that we’re all going to have a room in “The Good Place.” Hallelujah!

But, you know, that's a benefit that, hopefully, we don't get to enjoy for quite some time. Am I right? And that got me wondering, "Are there any benefits for us here and now?"

I think there are, and there are some stories in the gospels – stories about encounters that people had with the Risen Jesus – that illustrate what I'm talking about. I'll describe them very briefly.

Think about the women at the tomb, in our gospel reading this morning. They arrived at the tomb that first Easter Sunday morning full of sorrow, because someone whom they loved dearly had died. But they had this encounter with the Risen Jesus that transformed their sorrow into joy.

Later that same day, two of Jesus' followers had left town. They were walking on the road that leads to Emmaus, and they were filled with despair because they had pinned all their hopes on Jesus. But they also had this encounter with the Risen Jesus that transformed their despair into hope.

That evening, the Disciples were huddled together in fear, hiding behind locked doors, because they were afraid that what had happened to Jesus might also happen to them. But they also had an encounter with the Risen Jesus, and their fear was transformed into courage.

Now, Thomas wasn't with the other Disciples when they had their encounter with the Risen Jesus, and Thomas steadfastly refused to believe their accounts. But the Risen Jesus did finally appear to Thomas, and his doubt was transformed into assurance.

And then finally, several weeks later, Peter and Jesus are talking by the Sea of Galilee. Even though Peter is overjoyed that Jesus is alive, he's also filled with guilt and shame, because while Jesus was being interrogated and tortured, Peter denied even knowing Jesus. But after his encounter with the Risen Jesus, Peter's bondage to guilt and shame was replaced with a freedom that comes from knowing that God loves and accepts all of us eternally and unconditionally.

And so, the promise contained in the death and resurrection of Jesus, is not only that we each have a guaranteed spot in

heaven. But it's also a promise that, through our own daily encounters with the Risen Jesus:

our sorrow can be transformed into joy;

our despair can be transformed into hope;

our fear can be transformed into courage;

our doubt and can be transformed into
assurance;

and our bondage to guilt and shame can be
transformed into the freedom that comes
from the experience of God's unconditional
love for us all.

I've had a lot of encounters with the Risen Jesus throughout my life, and I'll wager that you've had them as well. But they probably weren't face-to-face encounters, like we read about in the gospels. Rather, the Risen Jesus came to us through the helping hands and welcoming embraces of the people around us. I'm

going to read to you from a letter I received just last week, from a young woman who experienced the Risen Jesus through the people of at St. Andrew's Church. She and her wife were members here at St. Andrew's, before getting jobs in Kansas.

But first, some background on this young woman. She grew up deeply entrenched in another Christian denomination that was not affirming of her sexual orientation. Eventually she gave up on God and the Church altogether.

But then, one day she got married, and her wife told her about the Episcopal Church where they lived in Virginia. And while it felt a bit better, it still wasn't right. In her letter to me, she writes:

“Then we move to Stillwater and walk into your church. The first person I met at St. Andrew's was your wife. I don't need to tell you how wonderful, warm, and welcoming she was to me that day. I don't need to tell you that she smiled at me with the warmest eyes when I told her I had a wife. And I can't

tell you how unbelievably amazing that felt to me. Then, the more we attended services, the more wonderful people we came across. I remember being intimidated by the "peace break" at first. I felt awkward and uncomfortable. The people of St. Andrews quickly changed that for me. ... I was overwhelmed by how at home I felt in your church. I had found the familiar sounds, smells, and routine but there was nothing familiar about the love and kindness and acceptance I had found."

This young woman grew up believing that God wanted to have nothing to do with her – that she was damned because of something she had no control over – until she walked into the doors of St. Andrew's Church, and had an encounter with the Risen Jesus through so many of you here.

[At the 8:00 AM Sermon] Now, in a few minutes, we are going to have the pleasure and privilege of welcoming Paul Steven Schauer into the household of God, through the Sacrament of

Holy Baptism. He is only seven months old, and so I am counting on him to put up a fuss throughout it all. But as part of young Paul's baptism, we are all going to promise to "do all in [our] power to support [him] in his life in Christ." And that means, in part, that we're going to help Paul look for the hand prints of God in this world. We're going to teach him what it means to open our hearts to the grace and truth of God. And, from time to time – and through us! – Paul will have his own encounters with the Risen Jesus. And, last but not least, our grand hope is that, one day, others will experience the Risen Jesus through him.

Let us pray: Everliving God, whose will it is that all should come to you through your Son Jesus Christ: Inspire our witness to him, that all may know the power of his forgiveness and the hope of his resurrection; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.