

Chairete! Rejoice!

March 23, 2008

(Easter Day - Year A)

Matthew 28:1-10

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

First of all, I don't want to keep you all in suspense any longer, because, if you remember my sermon from last week, I left you all hanging in mid-sentence, saying that you would have to come back to hear the rest.

So, I need to go ahead and finish my sermon from last Sunday.

As I was saying,

God takes our biggest disasters, our greatest losses, our deepest tragedies, and on the third day.....

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Now that we have gotten to the joy of the third day,

I want to point out that it seems, for the last several weeks, that our

Gospel readings in church on Sundays have been unusually long.

For three weeks running during Lent, the Gospel readings were all over 40 verses long.

Then, last week, we heard the story of the Passion and Death of Jesus - and that took 100 verses and 4 readers to tell that story.

Then, today, we get to the pinnacle point in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and it only takes 10 verses to tell us about the resurrection.

We need to remember that the Gospels were written to specific Christian communities, communities like the one here at St. Alban's.

And the Christian community that Matthew is writing to only needed 10 verses to describe the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

They only needed a very few words because they already knew the great joy that occurs when a Christian community is experiencing the resurrection.

Last Sunday afternoon, my son, John, and I headed over to the Farrell Center, the basketball arena at Baylor.

At the Farrell Center, they were having a party to watch on TV the selection of which teams were going to be a part of the NCAA Basketball Tournament.

The Baylor Men's Basketball team was on the bubble as to whether or not they were going to be selected.

Even though I am a big Longhorn fan, I wore my Baylor T-shirt to the festivities, so that I could root for my adopted team to make it into the tournament.

As most of you know, the committee selects 65 teams to play in March Madness.

Basketball players, coaches, university officials and several hundred people gathered in the Farrell Center to see if Baylor would make the cut.

As we watched the selection show on the big screen TVs, the tension mounted as the teams were selected:

Duke, Kentucky, Butler, Austin Peay were all selected.

As time went on, and Baylor was not mentioned, a hush began to envelope the crowd.

The 64th team was announced: Purdue.

Then, there was only one slot remaining.

We held our breath.

Then, the commentator on CBS said:

“And the last team selected in the West region is....

The Baylor Bears!”

HOO-WHO!

The crowd erupted in joy.

High-fives were exchanged.

Cheerleaders led the joyous crowd.

And Scott Drew, the coach, began grabbing the necks of all his players.

However, there was an unspoken story in that joy that I experienced in the Farrell Center last Sunday.

That joy was so great because, underlying the story of the Baylor Bears,

is their story of Good Friday.

Several years ago, the Baylor basketball program underwent one tragedy after another, until the team was stripped to the bone, barely able to remain in competition.

I am sure that the fans from North Carolina and Kansas and UCLA were all very happy to be selected to play in the tournament.

But for them, this happens most every year.

However, to those who had suffered and weathered the 20 year drought of Baylor's participation in the NCAA Tournament,

The selection of Baylor University was a sweet moment of sheer *joy*.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the two Marys have just experienced Good Friday.

They have suffered and weathered seeing Jesus killed and buried in the tomb.

On the way to the tomb, an angel appears to them and tells them the joyful news that God has raised Jesus from the dead.

They run away from the tomb with a mixed bag of feelings - fear and great joy.

Suddenly, Jesus meets them and says:

“Greetings!”

This first word that Jesus speaks, in the original Greek, is:

Chairete.

This is a difficult word for us to translate.

Unfortunately, *chairete* is translated in the New Revised Standard Version, the version that we read today, as: “Greetings.”

Somehow that word, “Greetings,” strikes me as inadequate.

Do we really think that Jesus' first words to the women would be so lifeless?

As if Jesus says to them:

“Hey, greetings.”

However - it is only the New King James translation that even begins to capture the rich intent of that word:

Chairete.

In that version, Jesus exclaims to the women:
“Rejoice!”

And I imagine that Jesus would say “Rejoice!” with even more jubilation than was experienced at the Farrell Center last Sunday. Jesus meets the women, running from the tomb and shouts:
“Rejoice, everybody! I am back!”
High-fives are exchanged and they grab each other’s necks in joy.

This is the kind of joy that the community that St. Matthew is writing to knows and experiences.

And this is the kind of joy that is experienced in the community of St. Alban’s today.

And the joy that I experience here is all the more sweet because we have weathered and suffered a few rough times together.

For I see evidences of joy on every side of me.

I see you involved in group Bible study in each other’s homes, growing joyfully in your faith and love for each other.

I see men and women here in these halls who are on their way to AA meetings that meet in the Mahan Commons, meetings that have joyfully changed their life.

I see people in the courtyard, joyfully meditating and praying in the darkness through the use of yoga.

I see children with violins in their hands who are joyfully expressing praise through music.

I see dozens and dozens of people who are discovering that they are called by God to joyfully use their gifts here:

To read Scripture out loud, to work in the flower beds, to lead Morning Prayer, to sing, to facilitate a group discussion on the Gospel of Mark.

I see you welcome people of all colors and beliefs and opinions with joyfully open minds and open arms.

And, I say to myself:

Chairete! Rejoice!

I do not need 100 verses of Scripture to show me the great, great joy of Jesus' resurrection.

This community of St. Alban's is all the evidence that I need that God takes the tough moments of the Cross, and God breathes new life into Christ's Body, into Christ's Church, and brings about resurrection.

However, I am sorry to tell you that, once again, I cannot bring this sermon to a conclusion today.

You must continue this sermon for me.

For after the risen Jesus and the two Marys rejoiced, Jesus told them to go to Galilee and tell the good news.

And you must continue this sermon by leaving this community of joy and going to your own Galilees.

So, please continue this sermon by loving other people with amazing grace.

Tell the good news of hope - that God *does* transform Good Friday into Easter.

Share the joy of the Resurrection, with high-fives and with joyful shouts of:

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

AMEN.

© The Rev. Jeff W. Fisher, 2008