

*Love lives again, that with the dead has been – love is come again like wheat that springeth green.
Amen.*

We've been doing a thing this Lent – trying to meet Jesus the way
people in the gospel met him – almost for the first time.

It can be hard to put ourselves in the shoes of people who lived in such
different times – but this week, it's not hard at all.

The way Mary meets Jesus in this story, grieving her loss, frustrated and upset –
and not recognizing him at all – that's often the way we meet Jesus.

Grieving, frustrated, upset – and not recognizing that he is standing right
in front of us, doing something unexpected.

We don't think the gardener is going to be Jesus, do we?

We don't think the bus driver, or our mother-in-law, or the homeless guy
is going to be Jesus, do we? Or the person in the pew next to you...

Living on this side of the resurrection means Jesus can and does show up
in all kind of people and places, doing all kinds of things.

Living on this side of the resurrection means nothing is the same,
nothing is as we expect "the world" to be.

We often expect the world to be a place of loss and frustration, don't we?

But living on this side of the resurrection invites us to see life in things that look dead.

I was once at a retreat where we had to find objects from nature
and see how they spoke to us of God. I went out looking, and I found
this little branch about a foot long, that was broken on both ends.

This little branch spoke volumes to me about God:

It was broken, but I could not break it further – broken and unbreakable.

It was creation. It was the wood of the cross.

It was mystery covered in bark – I couldn't see its insides, only the outside.

It had two little nubs on it that looked like once buds had been there;
it spoke of life.

Well, after the retreat I got it in my head to put this thing in water and see if those
nubs would generate leaves. My pastor begged me not to – he thought I was
going to be disappointed and lose my faith, because this branch was really dead!
But I stuck it in a plastic water glass on my desk.

And after a few weeks, a tiny bit of green appeared on one of the nubs.
And then the nubs got bigger, and greener.
Then a little tiny bit of a leaf appeared on one. And in about three weeks,
there were two clumps of leaves on that dead little branch,
cut off as it was from its tree, dead as it had been. There was life.

This was in the year after my sister had died, after a difficult and sad life.
It was a year in which I had been turned down for ordination.
I needed to remember to look for life.
That branch reminded me that God is in the business of bringing life out of death.
That branch spoke of God, and kept on speaking, inviting me to live
like the resurrection person God had already made me.

The resurrection was not a one-time party trick; friends.
It is our reality, the reality we are invited to live in beyond all the “realities”
that claim our attention.
We are resurrection people!
Eternal life doesn’t start when we die. It starts when we are baptized.
In a little while, Warren James Hobbs is going to become a resurrection person.
He will die and be raised with Christ, as all of us,
if we were ever baptized, have died and risen with Christ.
Warren’s baptism is not just a one-time party trick – it is for ever and always.
And if his parents and godparents do their job, with God’s help,
he will grow up wired to look for life, to look for where Jesus is.

As resurrection people, we cultivate a relentless hope, a laser focus on life.
We see where life is in things and people and places and communities
that seem dead or dying. We see the nubs on the dead branch.
How do we do that? We remember the big picture, the long game.
In living by faith in Jesus we borrow from the future.
We grab it and bring it into the now.
Jesus showed us our future when he walked out of that tomb
before sunrise that Easter Day.
He said, “Stick with me, and this is your future. And it starts now.
We have seen our ultimate future, friends, and it is LIFE. Life beyond death.
Jesus broke that open for us and says, “Join me in living the resurrection life.
Join me in declaring love in the face of evil, hope in the face of despair.”

When we join the Jesus movement, resurrection becomes our way of life.
In resurrection life, no one and nothing is beyond redemption,
There is hope in every situation, hope for freedom, hope for healing,
for transcending; hope for new life.
Where do you need to be reminded of hope and love and healing?

Here's our question this morning:
How will you, how will we become the resurrection people God already
knows us to be? The resurrection people we already are in God's reality?
And I can tell you, it's not just by coming to church once a week.
Resurrection life is celebrated here, but it doesn't live here. It lives wherever
we take it, wherever we find Jesus in what we thought was a gardener.

Do you want to become a resurrection person?

Here are some ways –

- ◆ Take a daily dip into God's word and get to know how much God loves you.
- ◆ Start sharing your faith life with other people with whom you can be real, who can remind you of God's love, forgiveness and healing power.
- ◆ Use your resources and your time – yes, your precious time – to reach out to people who are struggling, whether it's for food or friends or a folks they can call family.

There are many other ways, but those are a solid base.

In your pew is a card that invites you to say,

“Yes, Jesus, I want to live the resurrection life with you.”

Fill it out, put it in the offering plate or bring it to communion – we'll hook you up.

We are resurrection people.

We no longer have to go searching for what we've lost, what has died.

We are sent among the living, to find life, to bring life,
to find Jesus, to bring Jesus.

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!