

Easter Day, April 1, 2018

Lectionary B, John 20:1-18

Trinity Church, Russellville

Alleluia. Christ is risen. The
Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

That is the greeting we have
shared this morning. It will
continue to welcome our worship
during the Easter season. It is an
acclamation that the Spirit of
Christ is alive and well. We don't
gather this morning just to
remember an event two thousand
years ago. We worship to give
thanks that God's loving presence
continues to be with us

individually and in community,
and that as God was in Christ, so is
Christ's presence within each of
us.

On that first Easter morning,
Mary Magdalene came to the tomb
of Jesus and saw that the stone
covering the tomb had been
removed. She ran and found Peter
and John to come and see, fearing
that Jesus' body had been stolen.
They found the linen wrappings,
but did not understand at the time
that Jesus would rise from the
dead. The disciples returned to
their homes but Mary stood
weeping. As she wept, two angels

appeared with whom she spoke;
and then as she turned around, she
saw a man appearing to be the
gardener. Wondering if he had
been the one who took away Jesus'
body, she was startled when he
said to her, "Mary." It was then
that she knew it was Jesus, risen
from the dead.

Some people have assumed
that Jesus' risen body was a
resuscitated corpse. Yet, if it had
been, Mary would have recognized
him right away. In other
resurrection accounts, Jesus is not
immediately known. On the road
to Emmaus, for example, on that

same day, two disciples were walking along, talking about what had taken place with Jesus. Jesus himself came near and went with them. The disciples didn't recognize him at first but became suspicious about his identity when he began interpreting things about himself in the Scriptures. They urged him to stay with them since the day was almost over. He stayed, and when they were at the table together, "He took bread, blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight."

(Luke 24:13-35) His followers in these encounters discovered his identity as he called one by name and shared a meal with the other two in the breaking of bread. His presence was recognized, not by the nature of his appearance, but in the essence of his spiritual power.

I find this comforting. First, when we rise to new life after our deaths, our physical bodies won't be of any use to us. It is the spiritual body that moves closer to the very heart of God. It is the God within us that does not die. And it is in our life together, here in the breaking of the bread and in

fellowship with one another, that we recognize the Christ spirit in our daily lives. It isn't often that we hear of visual appearances of Jesus in modern days, but reputable people have experienced such phenomenon. No doubt these appearances are much like those that the early disciples and St. Paul experienced.

One of the blessings we enjoy together here at Trinity Church is experiencing Christ's presence with us when we come together for worship or fellowship, in service and outreach programs, and in working together to provide

resources to support the mission and ministry we seek to share. It may scare us a little, but God's presence was born into us, and the recognition of that essence is often discovered by others seeing it in us and helping us to nurture its growth. God's love and new life are with us to be discovered in our prayers, in our life together, and in our service to others.

Following the example of Mary Magdalene, the first evangelist, we have the opportunity to run after anyone who might welcome the good news of Jesus. As the opening words of

a book by a scholar friend of mine read, "You are forgiven -- nothing more...nothing less." (Wm. Countryman) Everything that can mess up our lives was absorbed by Jesus on his cross and was buried with him. His Spirit was renewed to let us know that God has the last word. And that word is one of hope and new life. The resurrection is witness to the fact that we get a second, a third, a fourth and many more chances to be a part of God's life, especially as we discover that presence in the person of Jesus.

The resurrection was not a one time event. It is witness to the reality that the Good Fridays of our lives, and even death itself, cannot end our journey with God. God as revealed in Jesus is alive and well, carrying us forward to comfort and sustain us; and at the last to bring us to eternal life.