

EASTER 2015 – April 5, 2015

The Rev. John K. Morrell, St. Mark's Church, Halifax

Let us pray - Creator and maker of us all - bless the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts - grow thou in us and show us your ways and inspire us to live by your truth. Amen

It has been a particularly difficult winter for many people here in Halifax and in Nova Scotia. The weather has been cold, snowy, icy and the covered streets and sidewalks have made it particularly difficult to get around. A number of the members of this congregation have been hit by the flu, lung congestion, strains to the heart and other maladies. A half a dozen have spent some time in hospital. Three of our long time members died the end of January. And in my own family, we lost my mother at the age of 98 in mid-March.

As you look around the church today, you see many flowers given in memory of loved ones who have gone before. They represent parents, a spouse, sons, daughters who we remember today. All of us have undergone some sort of suffering if not tragedy in our own lives. I hope and pray that if you have had a firm faith, that God has seen you through your troubles. For some, when tragedy strikes, they lose faith and blame God for everything wrong in their lives.

The time of Holy week, the days between Palm Sunday and Easter reflect the suffering and pain of Jesus, a man both human and divine, who died an excruciating death on a cross some two thousand years ago in Jerusalem. Throughout the thousands of years of human history, there have been many religions, most with many Gods, a few with a single God But until Jesus died and rose again from the dead, we now have the first instance of God taking human flesh, suffering pain and torture, and defeating human death by coming back to life.

I think most of us, if we could turn back the clock, would have liked to have the opportunity of spending more time with our loved one before they died, or even wish that they wouldn't have died at all. But we are humans and mortal, and birth and death have and continue to be part of our human condition.

Last month at our monthly service at Northwood, a woman came up to me afterwards and recited an Easter poem. Through further discussion and the borrowing of her portfolio, I learned that she is a niece to one our parishioners, Constant Chandler, and that she had quite a career in composing poetry and singing in choirs.

I would like to share this Easter poem with you as she is sharing it with the Northwood people this Easter morning.

Easter Thoughts

By Cynthia Ann Chandler

Our Saviour died on Calvary's tree
To free us from our sins.
Our hearts must thump
When we think about this;
So we'd better let Him in.

Thorns were place upon His head,
Nails were in His hands and feet.
Jesus really loves us,
That is something we can all repeat.

He had one pierced side that bled a lot.
Yes, he suffered day and night.

We are all supposed to let Jesus
Into our hearts,
So we all can see the light.

He suffered. Yes, He really did.
But He did not stay in that tomb.
If you get depressed or worried,
At the cross there is always room.

I say to you this morning: CHRIST IS RISEN! (congregational response should be: HE IS RISEN INDEED!). I am convinced! I have faith that Christ was dead and he was buried. That I believe. But, this too I accept as true: He rose from the dead and will come again in glory.

This is Easter. And to stand here on this day in this pulpit and proclaim this word ... I cannot begin to tell you how this defines all that we are.

The problem for most of us is that we are not surprised enough by Easter to realize we face a choice. Easter is a part of the background scenery of our lives. We've never been afraid of Easter, never been bewildered by it. Believing that Jesus rose again from the dead becomes a little like believing the earth is round and that it orbits the sun. Once upon a time people didn't know that. They thought the earth was flat and that the sun orbited the earth. It caused quite a stir when this view had to be revised. But that was a long time ago and now we accept that picture of our solar system without much thought. Sure the world is round and we orbit the sun, but what does that have to do with anything? It doesn't change what I have to do at work tomorrow, does it?

Is that what Easter becomes for us? We believe it happened but then, we've always believed that. Even Easter has somehow become part of the "routines" of

this world. So why would it have much of an effect on what we do tomorrow? Easter is no longer shocking for us--it surely does not make us re-evaluate everything else we think we know. And anyway, we're not sure we want to have everything in our lives changed.

Easter begins with fear. At least that's the way Mark tells it. Easter begins with the kind of fear that feels a lot like heart-break. It begins with the twist in your stomach that comes when the phone rings and you hear the voice of your sister. "Are you sitting down?" she asks--that kind of fear.

As Scott Black Johnston, tells it in his book **Deadly Things**

Early in the morning, three women approach the tomb bearing precious herbs and oils to wash the body of their Lord. They have come to comb out Jesus' hair, to sponge away the dried blood, to massage precious myrrh into his skin. They hope to engage in the ritual act (the act of care) that is traditionally done before sealing a body in the tomb. They have come to anoint the crucified one. Yet, even as they discuss how they will gain access to the cave (after all, it is closed by a massive boulder), they find that the stone has been rolled away. The tomb is empty--vacant, except for some young guy who is definitely not Jesus; and suddenly, they are afraid. They fear that their last chance to pour a little compassion on the broken body of Jesus has escaped. They fear that they are witnessing the final insult of this whole horrible affair. First, Jesus' life is stolen, and now, even his body has been taken. And, perhaps, they also fear... no, they simply must fear that death has won. Death, the ever-ravenous monster, has finally, and utterly, swallowed up their beloved friend.

Praise be to God our Father who raises the dead to life,
Praise be to Jesus the Son who shares his life with the faithful,
and Praise be to the Spirit who makes one with him. Amen