

*Risen Lord, our Light, our Rock, our Redeemer, our Living Word.
Let us hear You speaking to us this morning. Amen.*

Why are we here? Why are we here today, all dressed up in suits and bonnets, phenomenal flowers and symphony of sound signifying this is a Big Deal. But why is it a big deal? Why celebrate this 2000-year-old story about some religious guy who was executed and sealed temporarily in a rock tomb, and then found alive and wandering around a few days later, his tomb empty? Even Jesus’s followers thought the it was an idle tale – what do a bunch of hysterical women know?

Yet here we are, singing Alleluia! Why?

It’s not just because of what happened 2000 years ago.

We’re not here for a history lesson. We’re here for a hope class.

We’re here because we think just maybe what happened 2000 years ago has some power to bring to tomorrow.

When we worry – anyone here ever worry? – it’s usually about the future, what might happen. And underneath most anxiety is fear about death, physical death and the death of things and people we love.

Well, God has a word for us: God says our future is life.

That’s what these trumpets and lilies and alleluias proclaim, that God says our future is life. Life, life and more life.

Abundant life, rich and glorious, splashing out of the fountain life, life beyond the limits of this life – life beyond death.

God says, “This is what your future will be as you unite yourself with my Son.”

On Easter morning, our future came crashing into our now. It’s already started.

We are here not for yesterday or tomorrow –

We’re here because of what God is doing today, right here, right now.

Christianity has often been taught as a “there and later” thing.

“Become a Christian to reserve your spot in heaven, oh, and heaven is a place somewhere else, and not now.”

This distortion of the Good News resulted from word confusion.

Because Jesus' teaching about God's spiritual kingdom got translated as "the kingdom of heaven," and because we use the word "heaven" to describe that place we go when we die, the two got conflated. It sounded like Jesus was saying, "I'm telling you about a place you'll go later." But everything he said and did on this earth was about here and now. "Now the kingdom has come near. Now the kingdom is among you. Look! This is how things work in the realm of God – healing happens. Forgiveness happens. Justice happens. Generosity flows in God's realm."

God's realm is not just then and later – it's also here and now. Both/And! All that life and love and peace and joy we're promised in heaven is already here; we call it in every time we call on the name of God, every time we invoke Jesus' power and love and truth into a situation in our lives.

"For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth," God says. That's the Good News we proclaim in the face of poverty, disease, government gridlock, homelessness, war, climate change, That when Jesus walked out of that tomb, the new heavens and the new earth walked out with him. He brought our future to us. Into a frighteningly polarized world, into a deeply divided country, into our own broken hearts, God dares to speak this New Word – the Word made flesh, whom we know as Jesus the Christ, born, crucified, risen, alive.

What is the most iconic image of this past week? For me it was that shot of the interior of Notre Dame cathedral, rubble and ashes in the foreground, smoke rising in the ruins – and spotlit in the worklights a large cross gleaming against the backdrop of the still-standing apse. I was not the only person to look at that picture and say, "That's Good Friday. That's Easter. Easter is God showing up in our rubble and reminding us, "I got this. I hold you and your future. Into the worst the world can do, I bring life."

Listen again to this promise in Isaiah, a vision of God's preferred future for us: No more will the sound of weeping or cry of distress be heard in Jerusalem. No more infant mortality and premature death of the elderly. No more seizure of property by invading armies – or corrupt governments.

No more need to emigrate to find safety –

people will plant vineyards and eat their fruit – that's long-term stability.

That's global security – where every family has what it needs and a safe place to live.

Even the environment is at peace in God's preferred future:

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox

There's a promise of harmony for Earth Day tomorrow.

"Why do you look for the living among the dead?" the angels asked the women.

Always a good question for us. What are you looking for? And where?

You won't find it in the past, or in your dreams; you'll find deepening your life in God.

Those who are walking the Way of Love are discovering this.

God is not in the business of cemeteries but of nurseries.

Even now God making a new heavens and a new earth!

So what do we with our fabulous future that we borrow on now,

like an annuity that yields dividends to spend now AND principal for later?

Jesus' followers had to face that question: Now what?

They hid out for awhile, grieving and terrified, but once they experienced the

Holy Spirit seven weeks later, they discovered that everything

Jesus had promised was true. His power was full in them, undiminished,

to heal, to forgive, to proclaim. His peace was still in them,

his joy was still with them, his love still came through them.

That's why we're going to study the Book of Acts in our new Wednesday night

bible study starting this week – because there we see how God's power

continued to transform the world through Jesus's apostles.

And God hasn't finished. We are his apostles now.

Even now God is bringing into fullness the new heavens and a new earth –

and God to want us involved.

We are how God is revealing that new heaven and new earth.

We carry this life we have been given, this hope we have,

to places and people that are deadened, numb, hardened, lifeless.

Every time we bring hope in Jesus' name, we borrow from the future.

We become the new heavens and the new earth.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia.

Amen.

Luke 24:1-12

On the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again."

Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Isaiah 65:17-25

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.
No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days,
 or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
 and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.
They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
 and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD-- and their descendants as well.
Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
 but the serpent-- its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.