

Sermon for April 5, 2015 (Holy Pascha, Year B)
Offered by Nathan Ferrell at The Episcopal Church of Saint Mary

Texts: Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118; Mark 16:1-10

Know what: death is never the end of our story

So what: life from God's perspective looks very different

Now what: make the choice to see, and then to live, differently

Title: Life from God's Perspective

Alleluia! Christ is risen! ***The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!***

And so we have finally come to this festival day of joy and light and hope. Our long Lenten season of discipline is over, and now the season of celebration begins!

Welcome to the Feast, my friends! Welcome!

Whether you have persevered through a dedicated Lent of self-denial and walked the entire journey of Holy Week,...or whether you are just here today for the special holiday celebration, it makes no difference now. Welcome all to the Feast.

Whether you can point to actual experiences of our risen Lord's presence in your life, ...or whether you are a bit uncertain about the claims of resurrection, don't worry about that now! The table is spread, so welcome everyone to the feast!

Today, you and I are celebrating the fact that Jesus of Nazareth, betrayed, crucified and buried, walked out of his tomb before the sun rose on a Sunday morning.

His friends AND his enemies came and found that tomb to be empty.

This fact, and this alone, is the reason we are gathered here to celebrate nearly 2000 years later.

Everything appeared to be lost when he was put to death. He was betrayed and sentenced by a miscarriage of justice. Yet he was a good man, loved by the common people. It all appeared to be a hopeless and senseless mess, until the tomb was found empty. And then EVERYTHING changed.

Before coming to Maine, my family and I lived in Moorestown, NJ.

We moved into that town because it has excellent schools and we found the neighborhood that we wanted to live in, but the only house we could afford in that neighborhood was an old Victorian that had not been updated at all since the 1960's. I mean, not one bit. Just use your imagination.

Erin and I never back down from a challenge, so we bought it, and we embarked on a journey of continual renovation over the next 7 years of our lives.

It's a somewhat daunting task to begin tearing apart a home that others have lived in for decades before you. But we did it, and the place was in a state of continual transition for years as we slowly worked on it. And we had to start by tearing off all of the bad stuff that was pasted over the good bones underneath. It was messy.

Now, to the casual observer going by on our street, I am sure that it was difficult to understand what was going on. Piles of building material in the yard, ladders up in various places, some areas of siding repaired and repainted, others with their original, now dilapidated 19th century paint job. For years on end.

It must have looked to the neighbors like a hopeless and senseless mess.

But Erin and I knew the big picture. We had a different understanding of the circumstances. We knew that all of that demolition work was a difficult – VERY difficult - but also a necessary step in the renovation of that house.

We were able to see the mess and the appearance of destruction, not as loss, but as a necessary step along the way, because we knew the end game. We knew where we were headed, and we knew that it was going to be better and more beautiful in the long run.

The resurrection of Jesus turns all of our assumptions about the world upside down.

It's easy to look with common sense at the obvious mess in the world around us and see what appears to be pointless and hopeless destruction.

It's easy to experience the loss of a loved one, or the breakdown of your own body, and to feel lost in a pointless process that has no meaning or purpose.

But that's not the whole story. Because our Lord Jesus rose from the dead, we can know with confidence that death is never the end of the story, but is one more necessary step along the path to a life that is better and more beautiful.

Now, I know that some of you have struggled through this long, cold winter. Isn't that right? Anyone? And it feels today like it will never end.

And I know some of you have lost a loved one, or felt the pain of an important relationship that died and now is gone.

Others of you are distraught by the pain and suffering in the world which never seems to end. One crisis abates, and then another begins. An endless cycle.

On Good Friday, the Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Kenya released a statement about the killing of nearly 150 Christian students in his country.

So painful, especially in Holy Week.

His words were profound and deep, as the Church – in every nation – prepared to celebrate the resurrection.

“We must not rush on to Easter Day too quickly,” Archbishop Eliud wrote. “Horror is fresh in our minds...let us not run away or deny it, but stay by the cross. We stay with Jesus, the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, we share in the grief of Mary and we share in the grief of those who have been so shockingly bereaved, but as Mary was to discover, we know that this is not the end of the story. [And] We will not be intimidated because we know and trust in the power of the cross, God's power to forgive our sins, to turn death into the gate of glory and to make us his children for ever.”

There is just no way to deny the reality and the power of death in this world.

In some way, to some extent, Good Friday comes into each of our lives.

Only a fool walks through life expecting to be spared from the experience of Good Friday – betrayal, pain, injustice, sorrow, death. None of us are exempt.

Now, if you see this reality from one perspective, that can lead you right to despair. To dark and brooding thoughts. Even to anger and a violent attempt to strike back and protect yourself.

But there is another choice. Another perspective. Another lens through which we can make sense of the mess.

TODAY, my friends, you are invited to see life from GOD's perspective.

Death was not the end of our Lord's story, and it is not the end of our story.

Because Jesus rose from the dead, there is so much more to life than what meets the eye. From God's perspective, you too are raised with Christ and live a new and better and more beautiful life.

From God's point of view, you are an amazing and precious treasure. Because GOD treasures you, God will not allow suffering and death to end your life. God will not allow your life to fade away into oblivion.

We CAN make the choice to see beyond the mess and to see from God's perspective, but this does not come easily or naturally. It takes work, and practice!

And I think that this – right now – is a great time to practice! So let's do it.

Because of the resurrection, these are statements of truth from God's perspective. Please repeat after me.

"Christ lives forever." "I live forever."
"Christ is loved by God." "I am loved by God."
"Christ is holy." "I am holy." "And I am a saint."

Mmm, we need to practice that some more, so I want you to turn to the person next to you, and tell them these words, "You are a saint."

And now turn it around and declare it to them, and say, "I am a saint."

Good Friday is real. There is no way to deny it, but this is not the end of the story.

Death has been defeated. That's God's story! That's YOUR story, and you can live that story with hope right now, if you choose to accept it and embrace it.

Will you do it? Will you choose to see your life today from God's perspective?

May it be so. Amen.