

Jeremiah 31:1-6
Acts 10:34-43
John 20:1-18
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

There are things that happen to us in life that we just can't explain. By all objective measures, some of them seem impossible. But just because we can't explain them, doesn't mean they aren't real. Take falling in love, for example. Most of us have fallen in love or at least are curious about what it's like. We meet somebody we like and we enjoy their company and we like spending time with them and talking to them and listening to them. At some point in the relationship there is a shift.....something changes. The feelings are more intense and we begin to realize that we don't think we want a life without this person in it. That shift is what we call falling in love. There's no way to explain it, but it's very real. In the beginning it's not just real, it's all consuming. And as it grows and deepens, it becomes even more mysterious. Some of the most important experiences in our lives are things we can't explain. We are simple sure of them.

The news we share today with each other is impossible news. It's Easter!! There's no way to prove that it really happened, but that doesn't make it any less real. We look at each other and we say, "He is risen!" And we answer each other, "He has risen indeed!!" Impossible. That's an impossible statement and yet for the last 2,017 years, people have been saying that to each other. People have been rejoicing in the fact that Jesus died.....that's an historical fact.....and that three days later he was alive again. That's a debatable fact. We can't prove it.....and yet, people have risked their lives to worship him knowing down to the marrow of their bones that he is, in fact, exactly who he said he was, the Son of God. He died because he made that claim. And others have died because they refused to recant that claim. That alone is pretty powerful. It's more powerful than falling in love. At some point in our relationship with Jesus, something shifts and we just know. We know that all of it is real.....that Jesus is real.....that his resurrection is real....and that the eternal life he promised us is real.

We are people who walk by faith. We can't prove what we believe, but that doesn't mean it isn't real. You want to locate the soul in the human body? You can't, but that doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. Do any of us yet know what it is that starts an embryo's heart beating? Someone may have figured out the chemical composition that needs to be in place in order for that to happen, but that doesn't explain *why* it happens of the life force that makes it happen!

But we all know that it's a real phenomenon. It's the beginning of life. It's the beginning of eternal life. That's what Jesus did for us. Jesus gave us life that continues after the life we know now is over.

For the past week, the week we call Holy Week, we have set aside so many of our usual routines to remind ourselves of this most important event not just in Jesus' life, but in ours. We come together all year long.....week in and week out.....and we learn about Jesus' life. We hear stories about him. We listen to what he taught people. We pray to him in time of trouble and times of joy and all the times in between. We build a life with him and with each other. During this Holy Week, we pause for a moment to be with Jesus for a few hours in what was the culmination of his ministry to humanity. We watched and we listened on Good Friday to all the evil that was thrown at him.....through human beings just like us.....from the man in the street to the most powerful rulers of the day. Evil works through humans. It did then and it still does now. It's what we refer to as sin. And we all know when it's taken hold of us. Jesus was a man without sin. And Jesus was a man who resisted sin when it came him. He never responded in kind. He was firm in his resistance. Knowing how powerful he was, can't you just imagine the magnitude of the temptation to fight fire with fire? He had the means to do that, but he chose not to. And in choosing not to.....he defeated the very evil he must have wanted to flee. That was his job. That was his mission. That was why he came to us. To show the world that God is more powerful than evil. To show all humanity that in the end, God is the one who prevails. And he came to us to prove to us just how much God loves us. When we realize this, there is a sudden shift in our relationship with Jesus and with God. It's as inexplicable and mystifying as falling in love.

We know that Jesus died a gruesome death without ever fighting back....that he absorbed all the evil impulses that human beings can act upon.....and he emerged from the experience radiant and dazzling and all-powerful. Human beings offered up the most powerful evil impulses they could muster and God offered up the most powerful love he had to offer and God prevailed. Love wins in the end. It's a comforting thing to know down to the marrow of our bones when it feels like we've been enclosed in darkness. And those times of darkness come to each of us in one form or another.

The writer and theologian C.S. Lewis once said, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."

When we look at our lives through the lens of our relationship with Jesus, we see the world differently than those looking through a different lens. It is in walking into the tomb in search of Jesus that we discover the real life Jesus gave us. It is in walking into the tomb of a prison or a hospital room or the quiet loneliness of someone mourning or the desperation of the poor. It is

walking into their worlds of people who are wounded and broken that we find the kind of bond with other human beings that taps into the intimacy of our relationship with God. All intimacy begins and ends with God. Jesus simply put a human face on it. And Jesus endured and triumphed over the worst that humans have to offer which is his great gift to us.

Jesus comes to us where we are.....in our joy, in our sadness, in our moments of inspiration, and our moments of desperation. He meets us where we are in our doubts and in our certainty; in our hopes and in our anxiety; in our creativity and in our depravity.....and often when we least expect it! There is no place that we can be that Jesus can not and will not find us.

In the garden, by the open tomb, Mary has assumed.....not that Jesus has been resurrected from the dead, but that his body has been stolen. She is missing him, but she isn't expecting to find him. When she saw the tomb was open, she was expecting to see a corpse. She doesn't even recognize Jesus when he speaks to her. She thinks he is the gardener. But when she turns away, he calls her by name and she instantly knows who he is. Her intimate friend called her by name because he knows her name and he knows her. The impossible had happened. She had seen him die. She knew that was real. And now when he calls her name, she knows he's alive again. And that is every bit as real. Impossible. She can see him alive in front of her. Impossible.....but no less real. He came to her in her great sorrow.

And guess what?

He not only knows Mary's name, he knows yours as well.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.