

Reverend Jennifer Creswell  
April 4, 2010  
Easter Sunday  
John 20:1-18

Please pray with me. Dear Lord, be good to us; the sea is so wide and our boat is so small. Amen.

In our culture, I find that we don't talk about our faith very much. We may tell our friends where we go to church, or send on an email forward with something uplifting, but it's not often that we have substantial, honest conversations about what we believe. I'm not saying this is a good or a bad thing; just recognizing something I've experienced. Of course, I'm a religion geek, so I *do* enjoy a good conversation about faith when it comes up. And, you know, with me, if people know I'm a priest, it provides a slick entry into the conversation (honestly, I think sometimes people are out there *wanting* to have these conversations, they're just not sure how). "So, you're a priest, huh? I didn't know they let women do that. Hmmm. I never did get that whole thing about Jesus coming back from the dead. (Or the virgin birth, or the feeding of the 5,000, etc.). What do YOU think about it?" I usually answer. And my answer has changed a lot since the first time I was asked. And then I ask, "What do YOU think?" And I haven't done a study on this or anything, but my sense is that people these days struggle a lot with the "miracle" stories in the Bible. And it makes sense to me. Geez, I struggle, too. That's why my answer to the question keeps changing. But we live in this scientific society where we're used to seeing data and results and where we can prove or disprove almost anything. The miracle stories in the Bible—let's take the Resurrection today, since it IS Easter—they don't really fit into our understanding. We can't prove that they're true. We can't prove that they're not. The inclination, I think, is to write them off completely. To say, "they

are myths. People believed in that stuff back then. We're talking about history. That's not the way it is *now*."

*Did* a guy named Jesus in the first century get killed and then come back to life again? Did *the* resurrection happen? For me, that's not the important question. The question we need to be asking today is: *is resurrection possible?* And if you ask me my opinion about the Virgin birth, or the healing miracles of Jesus, or the feeding of the crowds, my answer (this month) will be pretty much the same: are these things possible? Are amazing things possible? And I think that they are. I know that they are.

I'm kinda in love with people. I can't believe the things they're able to do. I'm an introvert, so I need my down time, but my *favorite* part of my job here at St. Luke's is being with people, and walking with them through important and not-so-important stuff in their lives. I say "walking with them." What I really mean is, being with people, getting to hear their stories, praying with them and holding them in prayer, being honored with the sharing of their experiences and thoughts and feelings. I love it. I love talking to parents about to baptize a child. I love hearing couples talk about why they want to get married. I love sitting with families after someone has died and hearing about the person's life and relationships. These are momentous times in life, and it's such a privilege to share them with people. But I love the everyday times, too. In fact, it's this project of living in community with the same people, week after week, that I love the most. I love hearing about people's kids and grandkids. I love praying for a new job and hearing that one has come. I love being able to hold people in prayer when they are

experiencing loss, anger, fear, or remorse. I love eating with people—seeing what kind of food people like and what they bring to share. I love working with people out on the labyrinth, or in the sanctuary. I love it. But community isn't always easy. And I say what I'm about to say with deep understanding of what it means: I'm grateful for the gift of conflict in community. Because we're human and we're conflicted people, and when conflict arises—as it always will—community is a safe place for us to work and learn how to approach conflict with love. In community, with the same people around, it's likely that we'll experience the same conflicts again and again. And, while this usually makes me pull my hair out, it also gives me opportunities to keep working on my response to the conflict—hopefully learning sometimes—without walking away only to be surprised by the same conflict in another outfit later on. Being with people together in community, with the big events and the conflict and the everyday sharing—this is what makes it hard when people leave the community. It's hard to let go of people we know, *and who know us*. Whenever someone leaves, or someone joins the community, it changes a little.

Conflict, community, people, oh, yeah. I think people are amazing. And living with them in community, I experience resurrections that I feel are pretty miraculous all the time. When we hear stories about Jesus on the cross, and Jesus rising again, it may be hard to feel what was actually going on there. It is for me. But, living in community with people, we understand what it feels like to be present when someone's spouse dies. Or when someone is going through an exhausting divorce. Or when someone finds a lump in her breast. Or when someone's kids are having an awful time. Or when

someone is processing childhood abuse. And, living in community with people, it's impossible not to rejoice when the lump turns out to be benign, or when the job or the home turn up at just the right time, or when it's time for a beautiful new marriage, or when you can see small signs of healing in someone who has experienced deep pain.

Every person on this earth walks around bearing a heavy, heavy burden of pain. It's different for each of us, but life here is costly. So why don't we just all fall down? Why even try to bear the weight?

I don't really know. I think the answer is different for everyone. For me, there's a deep—almost physical—piece of knowledge that sits somewhere right about here, that *God is*. And because God is, I am. I don't know if that really makes sense. I just know that, in my darkest times, *while* I experience hurt and anger and all the other negative emotions, I know that God is—and that's enough for me not to despair.

A friend sent Ian and me a new CD this week, and there's a song I've been playing over and over. The album is "fireflies and songs," and it's by Sara Groves. I don't think it's supposed to be an Easter song, but it speaks strongly to me this Easter—I think because I'm coming out of a dark place, and the song acknowledges the darkness. It's a simple song. It keeps repeating: "hallelujah hallelujah /Christ our joy and strength." But the lines that really strike me say this: "*for good reason we carried heavy hearts/ it is good to come together/ in our friendship to remember/ all the reasons hope is in our hearts/ hallelujah hallelujah/ Christ our joy and strength.*"

Sometimes I don't know why hope is in my heart. That's why *it is* good to come together to remember the reasons. I think about the people who were the first ones in the empty tomb in John's story of the resurrection. Peter and the other disciple came running when Mary told them the tomb was empty. The guys looked in, saw the linen wrappings, and, John tells us, they "saw and believed." John tells us what they saw, but not what they believed. And the next thing they did: they went home. Mary stayed to talk to the gardener, who turned out to be Jesus. But today, I identify with Peter and the other disciple. They were in a dark place that Sunday morning. And when they went into the tomb, they didn't see Jesus himself. They didn't find someone to comfort them. They saw linen wrappings, and they believed. Maybe they weren't sure themselves *what* they believed, but it was enough. I get that.

Sometimes resurrection isn't big and miraculous. Sometimes it feels very small and unimportant. This season of Lent has been a painful time for me, personally. During Holy Week, I slowly started to notice that the anger and hurt I'd been feeling were a little less insistent, a little less sharp. These are small feelings, but they are resurrection to me—because they point toward a time when I *know* I will be whole again, even if I can't see it now. Shiny green shoots coming up out of tangles of dried up leaves and stalks are a small sign of the resurrection that is possible. The forgiveness for a small gaffe, the willingness to try something new—these are signs of resurrection that I see every day. From these, I know daily that resurrection happens. These point to greater and more difficult resurrections: art and gardens created through grief for a loved one who died.

New relationships after the death of a spouse, or divorce. Healing from serious illness.

Growth where there once was death.

Our God is a God of possibility. I *believe* this, but I also *see* it. Daily. Amen.