

April 12, 2009
The Feast of the Resurrection
The Rev. Kathy Crary

St James Episcopal Church
Fremont, CA

Settle in, I have two sermons in me this morning. I promise not to be as long as usual.

Earlier in the week I attended services at Grace Cathedral. The Bishop preaches and presides and the service is geared towards the clergy as we are in Holy Week. He blesses two kinds of holy oil used by clergy, one to anoint the sick and the chrism oil which is used at baptism and by the Bishop if he is baptizing, confirming or ordaining anyone in the parish visit. He talked about the woman who bought the outrageously huge amount of costly perfume and drenched Jesus' feet in it, wiping it with her hair. I was struck by the comment in the Gospel that the scent of it filled the room. After chiding her for her extravagance, Judas gets a stiff talking-to by Jesus, who says the woman is preparing him for his burial. Hearken back to the story of Lazarus and Jesus calling him back to life. No one wants to go near the Lazarus' tomb because they are convinced it's gonna stink something ugly in there. The Gospel text even has someone making that remark. After all, he's been in that tomb a couple or three days, in that heat...

Then we heard of Joseph of Arimathea claiming Jesus' body after he dies and Nicodemus the Pharisee, our friend from John's Gospel, bringing costly ointments for preparing the body. Today we get the women coming with spices to prepare the body properly, fearing no one will be able to help them move the stone. Surprise, it is already done, there is no body, there is a resurrection and we are the legacy of that great and terrifying set of events, slopping over with joy and confusion and disorientation.

We who have been the church for so long bear the burden of people waiting outside the church with spices and wrapping sheets, ready to proclaim us as dead and fearing the stench if they open the door.

We are the church, we have not died, we are always being resurrected as the Body of Christ and rejoice in the proclamation that Jesus has been raised from the dead. Now we are being raised up and filled with hope to face the challenges of this world. We are being renewed by the Risen Lord to be the resurrected Body of Christ in the neighborhoods, the towns and cities and the the world. We are not called to

perfection, we are called to service. We are not called to make apology for believing in God, for being faithful in worship, for continuing in the breaking of the bread and the prayers, for connecting to God and neighbor in order to serve. The crepe hangers stand ready to proclaim us dead. We have plenteous enough people who holler crucify, crucify. We know enough people who say, "How come you can't save yourself, Christian?" and "Where is God when YOU need him?" The tough answer is the truest one, you must have a death in order to qualify for a resurrection. The Christian life is seldom easy. Take heart, do not be afraid. God will send you out from here to announce the resurrection and to live the life of one who is forgiven and set free. God has been there ahead of us in Jesus Christ and knows the joys and sorrows, the transfiguration and the crucifixion and the resurrection. You know God is love, you know the joy of forgiveness, you have heard the message. Let us rejoice and be glad.

For some the visit to a church is a culturally-expected thing during certain holidays and events like weddings and funerals. The rest of the time you kinda hang out on your own. There are lots of things to do on a Sunday. This could be like the folks on the airlines that thank you for flying with them because they know you have other choices. And I agree: You have other choices.

But Christianity is not a fly-solo faith and worshiping together is integral to the life we lead. Jesus didn't go it alone, either, except when he needed to pray and then, alone, facing death on the cross. We still believe it takes a family, a village, a community to live this life. So, I'm going to ask you to think about that for a minute.

People may think our ritual is out-dated. People may think our music goes too slowly or was written too long ago to make any sense. People may have hoped this was the church you remembered in their mind from their childhood. That would be nice, and I'd like to be twenty-five again, but I've changed as I've added years, as has the church.

So here's the deal, if you don't attend church on a regular basis, I invite you to come next week, when no one is watching and expectations drop off a little. I invite you to walk through these doors expecting the unexpected, just like the women found on the first Easter morning. We invite you to pray, sing, read, listen, laugh and cry with us. We are a community of God, not a bunch of folks flying solo. We care for one another in

this place and we are working on being more welcoming and open to the people around us. There is no guilt trip implied, only a welcome.

Whether you have been here all week or you've just been here with us for about the last half an hour, the Easter message is the same for all of us.

Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia.