

Easter Day
March 23, 2008, Year A
St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Liverpool NY
The Rev. Carrie Schofield-Broadbent
"So What?!?: The Great News of Easter"

So What?!?

Perhaps you are asking: *so what?*

When I prepare a sermon, I like to picture someone in the congregation, in the middle of the sermon raising their hands and asking, "So what? So what does this really mean in my life?"

It's a valid question. Jesus' resurrection, of course was great news for Jesus, for Mary Magdalene, for the rest of Jesus' disciples, but what does resurrection really mean for us?

This is an incredible story!

The disciples came to Jesus' tomb, where they had laid his lifeless body just days before. And they found the tomb empty and the linen wrappings just laying there. Then Jesus appeared and Mary didn't even recognize him until he called her name. She realized he had risen from the dead and went on to proclaim the good news of the risen Christ.

I mean, this is even better than a Harry Potter story. Jesus was dead. He was dead dead. Not the kind of dead you see on Grey's Anatomy, where they resuscitate someone with shocking paddles and then they're just fine. Jesus had been dead for three days. Not even the most confident physician would have attempted that resuscitation.

But Jesus raised from the dead – which, of course was not only really good news for him and for his disciples, but on a much bigger level, it meant that the spiritual foundations of the world had radically shifted. Life triumphs over death. Goodness wins over evil. Love prevails over all and God is glorified.

This is an amazing story. But, what does it mean to us, here and now.

In other words: *So what?!?*

The truth of the resurrection is that death no longer has the last word. Suffering no longer has the last word. Life always wins. God continues to bring grace in our lives, even in the midst of pain, so that life can triumph. It means that no matter what our story is, no matter what we're facing, no matter where our journey takes us, that healing and wholeness, life and peace are always possible. It means that our stories continue, until grace has the last word.

The beautiful truth about the resurrection is not just that *Jesus* found new life – although that's great. The profound Easter truth, the truth on which we base our faith, is not that Christ HAS risen, but that Christ IS risen. Not that life triumphed over death, but that life

triumphs over death. That life still wins. God *still* acts to bring new life to the dry, broken places of the world and the worn out, shattered places of our lives.

To be sure, resurrection doesn't always happen as Jesus' dramatic bursting out of the dark tomb of death. Sometimes resurrection comes to us slowly, comes to us in waves.

I think of the cancer patient, who received grace to move from seeing herself as a victim, to seeing her life as a precious gift (that's a wave of resurrection), who finds a remarkable and undeniable peace that helps those around her cope with the crisis (a wave of resurrection), she heals enough both in her body and in her spirit to feel great about herself when she walks out for the first time without her wig on (a wave of resurrection), who becomes, probably without even realizing it, a beacon of light for other people who know her who are suffering themselves. (a wave of resurrection). She emerges tired for sure, but stronger. Physically, she can't do as much as she used to, but spiritually, she's so connected to God, the source of grace in her life, that her life has found a whole new meaning and purpose. She no longer gets trapped by the drama of life. She can't help but being astounded by all the beauty and grace of the world. That's resurrection. That's new life.

I think of the alcoholic who hit rock bottom; everyone but God had written him off as a lost cause. He finds strength to go to a meeting, and then another meeting, and then strength to quit drinking. He reaches out for help and finds a sponsor. He quits drinking again. He goes through peaks and valleys and doesn't give up. Eventually, this man is a sponsor himself, so strong, so connected to life that he is able to help others climb out of their dark valleys. That's new life. It's not always as dramatic as Jesus' Easter Day, but it's a resurrection story nonetheless.

I think of the 70 year old women who left an abusive marriage after 45 years, who eventually met her high school sweetheart who courted her and married her. And she lived her remaining years in love.

I think of the people who have found their way out of the pit of depression, the grieving children who can eventually smile when they think of their parent who died, the stroke patient who learns to walk again. I think of the victim of abuse who gradually learns how to trust another and who realizes they deserve love.

We learn a little bit later in the Gospel according to John that when Jesus appeared to Thomas after his resurrection, that the marks in his hands, feet, and side were still visible. There is no promise that we'll be perfect in this life, or that the scars we bear from the rocky parts on our journey will disappear; the resurrection gives us the faith that our sufferings, our challenges, our rough places, through the grace of God will become part of our strength.

[[10:15 -- Most of the time, new life comes in waves. That's a truth that sweet little Morgan will experience throughout her life. And today, as she's baptized, she'll experience a wave of new life in the waters of Baptism, forever sealing her in the truth

that life wins over death. We understand Baptism to be a spiritual death and rebirth. As we are submerged in the waters of Baptism (OK, it's only a symbolic submersion here...), we sense ourselves "in the tomb" in a sense. And as we emerge, we breathe in the first breath of new life, the Holy Spirit, our sins washed from us. And of course, it's a new life that continues. I can't imagine sweet little Morgan bringing with her the weight of any big ol' sins to her Baptism, for heaven's sake, but Baptism enters us into the new life that when we sin, we are forgiven. When we're in darkness, we know that light awaits us, when we are in death; we know that there is new life. So today, we'll proclaim, not that Morgan has been baptized, but that Morgan IS baptized, just as Christ IS risen.]]

The truth of the resurrection is that death no longer had the last word. Suffering no longer has the last word. Darkness does not prevail. Life always wins. Somehow, life always wins. God continues to bring grace in our lives, even in the midst of pain, so that life can triumph. It means that no matter what our story is, no matter what we're facing, no matter where our journey takes us, that healing and wholeness, life and peace are always possible. It means that our stories continue, until grace has the last word.

Of course, resurrection in our lives doesn't always happen as quickly as we'd like, or look exactly how *we* plan it to look, as anyone who's beaten an addiction, come out of a long illness, survived a tragedy will tell you. But new life does triumph.

The Good News of Easter is that Christ has risen.
The GREAT news of Easter is that Christ IS risen.

The Good news is that life triumphed over death.
The Great news, the Easter News, which we build our faith upon – is that life *continues* to win over death.

Alleluia, Christ *IS* Risen.
The Lord is Risen, indeed. Alleluia.