

St. Paul's Parish. Kent  
Easter Day, 23 March 2008  
The Reverend Allen LaMontagne

A sermon based on Acts 10.34-43; Psalm 118.1-2,14-24; Colossians 3.1-4; John 20.1-18

"EVERYDAY IS A HOLIDAY"

Usually when we gather here on a Sunday I am not mindful of the cemetery. But today, the setting in which we celebrate Easter has numinous meaning. I think and feel differently about death today because of the resurrection Gospel. Hearing proclaimed that "Christ is risen" cascades new light on common perceptions of the differences between what it means to be dead and alive.

On Easter, I wonder if a cemetery becomes what is called in the Celtic tradition, a "thin place," by which is meant a place where what separates the visible and the invisible is almost transparent, diaphanous. What a backdrop for proclaiming the Good News. If it were warmer, I'd say we could open the doors and let all of creation embrace our songs and prayers. Images like "surrounded by a cloud of witnesses" come readily to mind today. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, Holy Communion is believed to be a thin place; that God's people, the living and the dead, are present at the holy meal as we are One Body, One Spirit in Christ.

It occurs to me that our Easter egg hunt after services, that symbol of new life, will happen in close proximity to graves. This children's activity is only more hopeful and joyous in the spirit of the disciples' discovery of Jesus' open and empty tomb. As the disciples find Jesus alive, they themselves become childlike and enthusiastic. As Jesus breathes resurrected life into the disciples' world, they bubble with enthusiasm. Enthusiasm, by the way, is the English word derived from the Greek *en theos* which means literally "God in us." On this "our triumphant holy day," the Spirit in us sings Alleluia and our hearts enthusiastically echo the refrain.

Near where I lived in Connecticut there is a roadside restaurant, a fixture on Rt. 44 in Barkhamsted called the Log Cabin, owned by the Dileo family. You can always get a good meal there, breakfast, lunch or dinner--but what I remember even more about the Log Cabin and Joe Dileo is a carved, wooden sign on the wall near the end of the counter, not very big and quite plain, but in a few words it sends a big message; it says, "EVERY DAY IS A HOLIDAY."

Over the years that sign has come to mean more and more to me as I grow up in Christ. It has particular meaning today as we celebrate Easter among the graves of loved ones and friends, and in relation to our own graves. The importance of the little sign increases as the focus of Easter Day lessens, as will likely happen as the circumstances of our lives change in the days to come. The news moves on to the next scandal, the next tragedy, and we know what it is to hear those questions about where God is in times like these... How can God allow such painful loss and suffering? That's when the little sign becomes

an Easter proclamation all over again, and God knows, we need it. In the days to come, we need to remember that what Christ does on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday to bring us to this Easter holy-day, is what make everyday a holy day.

If you noticed, I read the Gospel according to John instead of Matthew as indicated in the bulletin. The two are not vastly different, but in reading both to prepare this sermon, John gives a little more illustration of what "everyday is a holiday" means. For everyday to be a holiday for us--and not any holiday, but the holy Day of Resurrection--we need to see ourselves as the disciples in the Gospel story of the first Easter morning. We need to do what they do. For everyday to be a holiday, everyday we need to step out in faith--to do something. But at first, the disciples are immobilized by grief. They remember nothing of what Jesus says and does over the course of their journey together. His words about how he would die and three days later be raised from the dead might as well have never been said. The miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead is lost on them....

The women, at least, go to the grave, and it's there that a mundane task becomes a bridge between heaven and earth. To tend the grave and Jesus' body is all they have in mind... But you never really know how God is going to show up in our lives... Let's face it, the women get the men motivated; a couple of them step out in faith, curiosity impels them to get moving.... *It's not a holiday without some sense of wonder in it.* The prayer we pray over those being baptized, you know the one.... "Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed on these your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised them to the new life of grace. Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works." We need to put legs to that prayer, put our hearts into it and live it. In every activity, God is with us: in the kitchen, in the yard, even at the grave we make our song: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia. Seek and ye shall find..

What else are the disciples doing? *They communicate.* They gather personally, not just through the internet. They gather and they go out and they come back--and they talk to one another. It's not the easiest conversation. They doubt, they misunderstand, but they communicate. *And so must we.*

The whole 2000 plus years enterprise of spirit-driven Easter people now lives and dies with us, with our generation... As important as are the roles of Mary and Peter and the other disciples, ours are now. **Yes, we need to tend the graves here at St. Paul's, but God makes one thing abundantly clear this holy day--there is more to life, much more for us to do before Christ comes again and opens the graves and raises the dead. Death does not have the final word, but holds within it the gate of new life; not life to wait for to happen, but resurrected life that is already underway. Faith, Baptism, Communion, are means by which we are born from above in new life--and not just once but countless times--everyday is a holy-day when we live with Christ daily in faith.**

*Step out in faith...gather...doubt...wonder...talk...pray...believe....give...serve and love your neighbor as your self--these are the components of holy-day living every day.* If we

sit waiting for something to happen, it may not. Learn from the Gospel today, live it--  
step out in faith; in the name of God, in the power of the risen Son, in the Spirit of Love.