

April 1 (Easter)    Acts10:34-43    1Cor.15:1-11    Jn.20:1-18

Let us pray:            O God of love, you opened for all the gates of life everlasting as Christ rose from death. Help us joyously proclaim in life this greatest love-story, to bring hope, healing and peace to all. Amen.

‘Alleluia, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!’ Today we won’t fail to appreciate this joyous celebration of Easter. If we love Christmas as the joyous liturgical high feast, we’ll inevitably find Easter as an even more joyous high feast.

To a certain extent, we’re not unlike the biblical characters embracing Christmas and Easter first-hand. For Christmas, the shepherds in the field, the three magi, or even Joseph and Mary, all of them were filled with awe, which eventually sank in to instill joy. For Easter, the disciples were likewise first got awe-stricken, but joy kicked in much more quickly, and such joy also quickly washed away their fear, worries and doubt – such as what happened to the disciples Mary Magdalene, John and later Thomas, the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and finally Peter.

Today from our Gospel Reading we heard about how the joyous Mary turned from her weeping into her joyous clinging onto Jesus as she said to him, ‘Rabbouni (which means teacher)’. To that, Jesus had to say to her, ‘Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brother and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ Won’t it surprise us that this joy-filled Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’, and she told them that he had said all those things to her’? Of course she would do so: Jesus’ resurrection fills her with hope and joy.

For us, we may not have experienced that depressing hopelessness which the disciples experienced on Good Friday. Whilst we also walk through Good Friday, in fact walking the Stations of the Cross, but even then we knew full well that Jesus would rise from death on the third day, having overcome sin and death for all. For us, the cause for our Easter joy comes also from additional facets beyond the centrality of (a) Mary Magdalene’s joy that she didn’t have to weep as she lost her teacher, but could again cling onto him, or (b) John’s joy experienced when he saw the empty tomb with ‘Jesus’ linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head rolled up in a place by itself, he believed that Jesus had been risen from death and he believed’, even though he still ‘did not understand from the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead’. Such faith in Jesus’ rising from death must have given John lots of joy as he returned home, as compared with Peter’s not yet acquiring faith on Jesus’ resurrection as he too returned home.

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As I say that, you may wonder what I'm referring to as I alluded to 'our additional facets of joy'. Well, the centrality of joy deriving from our seeing of hope out of despair in our own context won't be much different from that experienced by Mary Magdalene and John (i.e. Jesus is alive despite the cruel crucifixion). Yet for us who live in this contemporary world, wrestling with our challenges day-in and day-out, our Easter hope from Christ's conquering death to open the gates of new life permeates throughout our daily life to fuel our joyful confidence that wherever we encounter darkness in the world, we know such darkness does not have the last word. We know it is life in resurrection from on high that has the last word.

We are all familiar with global darkness happening all over the map as we read, watch or listen to news from the media every day. News like Russia could have killed an ex-Russian spy and his daughter resident in Salisbury, England by applying on them powerful nerve agent, such that political leaders in UK, US and German were all protesting against Russia. News like Syrian civilians from old to young were killed in thousands as they got trapped in the deadly war between the national army and hardline rebels. News like the Parkland School gun-shooting by a 19 years old ex-student, with 17 being killed and others injured.

And it is not only what hit the news. Each of us is aware of darkness from power of principalities looming large around us, even in each family's own dynamics. For example, how fast are the growth-rate of dysfunctional families in our society? Or, is it mere co-incidence that more mayors in the Lower Mainland opted not to be re-elected than those who continue to persevere in tackling the numerous challenges facing our urban cities in the Province? Or, when will the expanding gap between the Have and the have-nots take a break, with escalating problems on basic human needs for housing and health problems? Or, when will the erosion of healthy foundation of peace and order cease to avoid growth of chaos?

Even in the life of a small parish, I saw people wrestling in terms of basic premises such as their doomed desire to share life in faith with their future generations. At one point of time, there were possibilities of baptisms for four candidates today (with Easter being the most suitable day for baptism in the year). Yet it turned out that none of these two babies, a 3-years old toddler and a teenage girl can be baptized today. Their disappointment arose from various different factors in family dynamics. For me, the lament is not about how many could have been baptized today, but rather about the growing 'atheist mentality' of some people prevailing over their other family members who were still steadfast in Christian faith. Worldly darkness seems to be prevailing over life, just like the death-tolls

surging from violence of myriads upon myriads pervading throughout the world. It takes strong faith like that of St. Paul to howl at the darkness saying, 'Where, O death, is your victory . . . The sting of death is sin . . . but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 15:55, 57) and our Second Reading today reminds us: 'The good news that I proclaim . . . through which . . . you are being saved . . . that Christ died for our sins . . . and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day.'

It's only with such joyous Easter good news that we can move on in faith to sing 'Alleluia, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia', even at the grave, for we know that the grave will be turned into an empty tomb, as we let your life to be hidden with Christ in God. And that's not merely an expression of theology. Nor is it a slogan. It's the crux of our faith in life. Otherwise, Christianity and the celebration of Christ's resurrection couldn't be carried on for 2,000 years, and there won't be ceaseless witness by followers of Christ over the ages that, as we heard in our First Reading today, 'everyone, who believes in [Christ] receives forgiveness of sin through his name'. That's exactly how the world can receive proclamation of healing and peace despite non-stop violence and ill-will purging over the whole earth: with Christ's overcoming death on the cross by rising from death, he has secured for us forgiveness of sin as our passport for salvation.

Imagine: if forgiveness is not part of the equation for human commitment to truth, respect and reconciliation, both the transgressors and victims of violence got stuck with perpetual retaliation and guilt. There's no hope to break through the darkness from the bondage of sin. Again, if forgiveness is not an option for reconciliation with God and with fellow human beings, there will be no chance for starting afresh as a clean slate – who can move on with that heavy burden on consequences of sin and guilt tied onto one's neck and back? Isn't that the cause for manifestation of arrogance as attempt to shake off those heavy burdens, and of depression upon recognition of impossibility to break through? Save for the good news of Easter as God's love and forgiveness conquering Satan's venom of death, how can there be life refreshed? Isn't that what we see and lament about as reality amongst us: whether on individual, familial, societal, national and inter-national level?

Yet, as in the sad little story I told above, the western world is now dominated by people who view atheism as the progressive choice in utter denial of God's love and forgiveness. We need not lose heart though, for we, as faithful remnants of the people of God, are entrusted with the Good News story to share. We dare not withhold from sharing our treasure of Easter joy, and so we gladly tell that greatest love-story in the universe, as much as we live by it.

Perhaps like Moses we may think that we are not eloquent enough in speech and so we stay behind shyly to refrain from sharing our treasure through telling of the Easter story. Well, whilst we are no expert in story-telling, we need to remember how St. Paul reminded us the down-side of keeping the good news story to ourselves alone – on this Easter good news of ‘universality of salvation for all’, St. Paul wrote: ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. But how are they to call on one in whom have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? . . .’ (Rom. 10:13, 14). Whilst we may authentically feel that we are not good candidates to share the good news story of Easter (especially in theological terms), do we recall how Jesus told the ‘greatest love-story’ when some Greeks came up to Jerusalem to worship at the Passover Festival asked Philip to take them to see Jesus? There, Jesus said, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. . . Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – ‘father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.’

Well, such can likewise be our personal witness in telling the joyous Easter story as the greatest love-story in the world – the world that desperately needs light, hope, reconciliation, love and healing, including our hearts which sometimes can be in such grieving pain. Here I invite you to turn to Hymn # 237 in our Blue Hymn Book (‘Now the Green Blade Rises’) to see a sample of how that great love-story is told, like Jesus’ telling the story of a single grain falling to become fruit-bearing wheat . . . [let us sing together: all 4 verses] . . . May we too proclaim that good news story by living it out as followers of Jesus, as Jesus told us: whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also’.

Let us pray again:            O God of love, you opened for all the gates of life everlasting as Christ rose from death. Help us joyously proclaim in life, this greatest love-story, to bring hope, healing and peace to all. Amen.