

Christ is Risen! **Christ is Risen indeed! Alleluiah!**

In the name of the Father and the Son + and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Every day some thing or topic or occurrence
leaves me perplexed.

I am the mother of a toddler, so there's plenty to baffle me daily:

I may puzzle over, "Where did you learn that word?"

"What do you *have* in your hands?" or a new but perennial favorite,

"How did food get *there*?"

But more than raising a toddler perplexes me.

This week alone, on Tuesday a preschool student asked me,

"Why did Jesus have to die?"

On Friday we had to balance concerns about the weather

with yearly adoration of our Lord's life-giving cross.

And all week, I carried with me the mystifying matter

of what to preach about on Easter Sunday.

So this Easter, I am perplexed.

Which means I'm with the women:

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James,

and the other women,

who leave their homes expecting to find

a closed-up tomb,

a dark, dank grave,

and a dead body

upon which to put the spices they'd prepared.

What comes next is a familiar scene to many of us by now.

The women arrive at the tomb and

find the stone rolled away

and do NOT find a body.

In the next cut

some sparkly angels bring good news.

And our minds jump right in

to the rising part.

But let's stop before the jump this Sunday.

Let's push "pause"

and dwell for a moment with those women
who find all their expectations upended
at the empty tomb.

The Gospel-writer Luke tells us
that they are *perplexed* about this.
Perplexed.
Puzzled. Mystified. Dumbfounded.
Disconcerted. Discombobulated. Disoriented.
The women are in shock-ful doubt
and do not know which way to turn.
The group is collectively at a loss,
and do not know how to decide or what to do.

While in this state,
during their active feeling of perplexity and all that goes along with it,
two men
in dazzling clothes
stand *beside* them.

Notice that the two men in dazzling clothes,
they don't *confront* the women with their news.
They don't shout their message, glorious as it is,
in front of their faces.
No, the holy messengers stand
beside them.
Shoulder-to-shoulder.
Hip-to-hip.
They stand *with* the women in their perplexity.
They acknowledge the confusion.
I imagine these message-bearers
whispering in the women's ears from the side,
"Why do you look for the living among the dead?"
It's a confusing question.
A question that recognizes the perplexed mental state the women are in.

Only after standing with them, acknowledging their bewilderment,
do the messengers offer an explanation for the empty tomb:
"He is not here, but has risen."

The women are not yet over their loss
 when the divine messengers begin to speak.
 They have not worked through their feelings
 when dazzling light begins to surround them.
 They have not let go of their shock and doubt;
 they are still confused and bewildered
 when Christ's resurrection is announced.

And then, the messengers continue
 with a message to shake the women out of their particular confusion:
*"Remember how he hold you . . .
 he would rise again."*

I imagine the women, still stricken and perplexed,
 turning their heads to the side and hearing,
*"Remember what he said?
 He kept his word.
 God kept the promise
 and Christ is risen."*

I imagine these words causing the women to shake their heads
 and "come back" to reality
 except that they're not "coming back" to reality
 but instead grasping an entirely new one.
 Their snap-back is to a reality
 where the Son of Man is risen,
 where bodies do not stay in tombs,
 and where God's promise of steadfast love
 indeed endures *forever*.

And then, in an instant,
 the "play" button is hit again.
 The women believe so quickly.
 They go and return home from the tomb
 and tell all of this to the eleven disciples and more.
 We love that part.
 But let's not allow the jump to belief and sharing
 obscure the resurrection that breaks in
 in the midst of perplexity.

Because in the Easter story,
 resurrection interrupts perplexity.
 Resurrection doesn't wait for everything to be nice and tidy.
 Resurrection doesn't care if the women have sorted out
 and figured out what's going on
 before explaining *Christ is not here. Christ is risen.*
 Resurrection is not concerned about levels of belief
 before testifying to God's entirely new reality.
 Yes, resurrection acknowledges perplexity
 and interrupts it.

That is why this Easter,
 I'm loving the women's perplexity.
 I'm loving that
 God's news of resurrection,
 God's defeat of death and destruction and despair,
 God's promise of new life
 answers all the confusion and disorder and perplexity.

Because I don't need to go stand at an empty tomb
 to be perplexed.
 Our own lives and our world today
 continue to pose questions and present situations
 that confuse, shock, or disorient us.
 A friend who's the paragon of health calls to say he has cancer.
 We have to go on living without a person we love.
 Our political life grows increasingly hardhearted and divided.
 A fire overtakes a beloved, centuries-old place of God.

The Easter Message
 is that God doesn't wait for us to figure the perplexity out.
 God doesn't need us to know or understand everything
 before doing what God wants!
 And God wants to raise the dead.
 God wants show that goodness is stronger than evil
 and is stronger than hate.
 God even acknowledges our confusion
 while explaining to us
 that light is stronger than darkness

and reminding us
that life is stronger than death.
God doesn't wait for us to figure it all out
before announcing that Christ is risen.

What God has done in raising Christ that first Easter morning
is what God is doing on this Easter day
and every single day:
standing beside us, joining us in our perplexity,
and answering our confusion
with resurrection.
Promising
that before we call,
God will answer;
while we are yet speaking,
God will hear.
Assuring us
that perplexity is not the end of the story,
that death is not the final note,
and that there is always, always new life.

Christ is Risen!
Christ is Risen indeed!
Alleluiah!
Amen.