

The Easter Sermon  
Christ Episcopal Church, Middletown NJ  
The Rev. Dr. William Carl Thomas  
April 1, 2018

Hallelujah, Christ is risen, the Lord is risen indeed, hallelujah!

Years ago, maybe 10 or 12 years ago, I decided that when I wrote an email, I needed some kind of a signature line to close it, something that was different than just the word shalom or faithfully yours in Christ, something that might have a little bit more meaning to it. And I saw these words come out of my fingertips as I wrote them on the screen.

May the blessing of God find you when you least expect it and need it most.

May the blessing of God find you when you least expect it and need it most. And I thought, well, this is pretty good.

I wonder who wrote that. And over the years, I've gone into the Google from time to time to find out if it can be attributed to somebody. Somebody? I think it's mine.

I don't want to be too prideful, but it works. May the blessing of God find you, almighty, find you when you least expect it and need it most. And I want you to hear that in light of both how our lives are lived today and also at the time of darkness that Mary Magdalene and the others were going through in the week that we have just remembered as Holy Week, when they're coming to that particular moment when they've been sitting at the tomb, he's dead, they do not know if he's going to rise.

You see, we are people of the resurrection. We know that Easter Sunday comes. We can fall into the trap of knowing that Easter Sunday comes.

We can almost just take it as a given and not think that much about it, but try to put yourself in the mind of somebody who did not know, that was so anxious and worried, because everything they knew in life was upended, and whatever they thought they had been told was now different, and if it could only be but what he said it would be, wouldn't that be nice? And so Peter and the other disciples, they go to check. They don't find Jesus. They go back to their homes.

Mary Magdalene goes, and the interesting thing is she looks in, and the angels that are sitting in there tell her to go outside, and she still doesn't see what she

desperately wants to see. How often have you looked for something and not seen it, only to discover it was right there all the time, okay? She turns, and she supposes Jesus to be the gardener, and it's wonderful that when he actually says her name, that's like a way of being in deep relationship with somebody, when you call them by their name. It's a way of saying, I know you for more than what you do, maybe I know you for who you are.

It's at that moment, the relationship she has with Jesus, whatever it is that's keeping her from seeing him is shattered, and she sees him, and she cries out from deep within, Rabboni, teacher, and she knows, and then she's given her mission. Go tell everybody what's happened. We won't spend too much time on why the woman knew first, and why Mary Magdalene, but if you're an EFM, have fun thinking about it, or studying it.

It's a great question, but I want you to think about it in the framework of, may the blessing of God Almighty find you when you least expect it, and need it most. I have to tell you, she's there. I'm pretty sure since she couldn't see Jesus standing in front of her, much as she least expected it, she's kind of not thinking it's really going to happen.

She can't see it, and then when she needs it most, she finds it. It's like Clopas and his companion walking away on the road to Emmaus when Jesus breaks the bread. All of a sudden, they see him.

They've been complaining to this guy that's walking with them all the way down the road, and they hear him explain the scriptures. They don't know it's Jesus, but when that which gains them entrance into how they know him in the breaking of the bread, having communion, their hearts burn with fire, and they run back to tell everybody. It's a moment when they least expected it, because they were walking away from the horrible day of Jesus's death, and they needed it most.

And then we have in the scripture that Paul writes today to the church in Corinth, and he's explaining all about all the people who saw the resurrected Jesus, and how Jesus appeared to them, and he goes down the list, and you could say, sure, he's trying to justify himself as an apostle, but Jesus appeared to him. It's amazing and wonderful that Paul can write about myself as one untimely born. I who persecuted the church, he appeared to me.

Now, we know from the Acts of the Apostles that Jesus appeared to him as Paul is knocked off the horse on the road to persecute in Damascus. May the blessing of God find you when you least expect it and need it most, and that's what happened to Paul, and then Paul gives us the gift of writing about it, and

sometimes reading what he wrote is hard to read out loud, but it's still wonderful that he's able to testify and let us know. Now, I want to make sure I get these words correct, so I'm going to look at my little phone here.

I want you to think about this idea of least expected and need it most in the way a consumer culture starts to push things towards people. When you are prone to living life as a series of transactions, your framework is scarcity. You do this for me, I'll do that for you.

If you've got more, maybe I can have some of it. If I've got something you want, you get it, and really, when you think about it, how often do we think about our relationship with God almost as somewhat of a transaction? We can fall into that trap all too easy when we can say, God, where were you? I needed you. I expected you to be there because I did this, this, this, and this, and where were you? That's basically a transaction.

However, when you accept the notion of transformation as the natural outcome of life, you embrace abundance. Transformation is what Jesus offers because we are in relationship with him. He knows us by name.

What did Jesus transform? Well, think about this. Just not you and me who are in relationship with him, but he took a horrid symbol of the power of the state across, which was used for crucifixion. Just go see the movie Spartacus.

You know what I'm talking about, all right? And that's how the Romans kept order. Dying on the cross and then rising again changes the whole meaning of the cross. We now see it.

We have it hanging here in the church. What does this mean for us? It means new life. It's the blessing that we least expected and needed most, this love of God that has come to us.

It's the way of reminding us about abundance. Jesus says to Nicodemus when he comes to him in the middle of the night, Nicodemus, this leader of the Jews trying to find out, trying to understand, and Jesus says, I came that they might have life and have it abundantly, abundantly. That's where grace reigns, not the scarcity of wondering what's going to happen, but being that we are so darn fully human, it's appropriate to hear this thought.

May the blessing of God find you when you least expect it and need it most, because so often we live our lives with our eyes down, not up, worrying about what's just in front of us, or not having enough, but not realizing that on a day like today when we finally get to proclaim, get ready for it, we finally get to

proclaim, get ready for it, we finally get to proclaim, get ready for it, that word hallelujah again, when we finally get to do that, this is when we realize that the abundance of love is what we have, and there's more than enough to go around, and what Mary Magdalene is doing is she is out proclaiming that love, so when we cry hallelujah, Christ is risen, the Lord is risen indeed, hallelujah, we're actually also making a promise to be part of that blessing for somebody else who is in that moment of least expected and need it most.

So when we leave this place and we're thinking and saying hallelujah, we are also saying love, we're also joining in Jesus, we're also releasing the captives, we're doing everything to restore the relationship with God that Jesus has restored for us by participating in that love, so as you hear those words, hallelujah, Christ is risen, the Lord is risen indeed, ringing in your head all week long, just remember that you have received the blessing that possibly you least expected, but today you need it most.

All these words I offer in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, hallelujah.