

Christ Church Cranbrook
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
Sermon for Easter Day ~ April 20, 2014
The Reverend Ronald D. Pogue

The Rt. Rev'd Cate Waynick, who was once a Priest in this parish, is Bishop of The Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis. A couple of weeks ago, she and I were talking about how the Christian faith as expressed by The Episcopal Church should be attractive to those in our time who say they are "spiritual but not religious." Bishop Cate said, "We have to hope that when they find their way into an Episcopal church, they don't find a people who are religious but not spiritual."

Bishop Cate's words have rung in my ears ever since. They are words of wisdom and words of exhortation for Episcopalians who truly want those signs that say, "The Episcopal Church Welcomes You" to mean what they say. It seems to me that both the form and the power of Christianity are necessary and the challenge for us as a Church is to constantly seek a balance of the two so that our worshipping community can be healthy and the mission entrusted to us can be vibrant and world-transforming. The seasons of Lent and Easter provide us with an annual opportunity to examine that essential balance and restore, refresh, or renew it where needed in our life together.

During the forty days of Lent each year we spend time getting ready for the celebration of Easter. There is fasting, self-denial, prayer, intensified devotion, scripture study, and other disciplines designed to cleanse our hearts and the heart of our community.

Then, comes the big celebration. Easter. Like so many Christian holy days, Easter seems to disappear the next day as life returns to "normal." But Easter should be more than that to us! It certainly was to those early disciples. Easter is more than a day!

Easter is a season of celebration. The Risen Christ walked among his disciples for forty days after his resurrection. He taught them, ate with them, prayed with them, and loved them. Before he was taken up into heaven, he promised to send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. The promise was fulfilled on the fiftieth day when they were in Jerusalem celebrating the Jewish feast of Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks. Pentecost is seven weeks after the observance of Passover and commemorates the spring wheat harvest. This feast has also been associated with the remembrance of the giving of the Law to Moses. As the law was written on tablets of stone, the Spirit would write God's law upon the hearts of believers. When Moses came down from the mountain, he found God's people worshipping an idol and 3,000 of them died. When the Spirit was given, the disciples were obediently waiting in Jerusalem. 3,000 people were saved! The New People of the New Covenant were empowered by the Life-giving Spirit to be Christ's Body in the world, proclaiming to all the Easter message that Christ is alive.

Easter is a lifestyle. We are Easter People! As those early disciples in Emmaus and Jerusalem and in Galilee experienced the living presence of the Risen Christ, so we recognize that he stands among us today. To paraphrase Jesus, "believing is seeing." When we gather to hear the Word and share in the Holy Meal, it is usually easy to experience his presence "enthroned upon the praises of his people." The challenging part comes when we disperse. When Christ's Body touches the world through you and me when we are apart from one another, do you suppose the Living Presence is felt?

Easter is our only hope. The New Testament epistles are filled with Easter hope. St. Paul writes to the Colossian Church, “When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory” (Col. 3:4). And to the Church in Corinth, he writes, “If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died” (I Cor. 15:19-20). St. Peter writes, "By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). There is a lot of *help* out there for people with all kinds of problems and needs. Most of you have sought that help and so have I. It is very important for us and for those we care about that we do so. But Christians believe that beyond *help*, people need *hope*. So what if you are physically or emotionally well? Life is just not complete without hope. The Easter faith gives the world hope.

Easter is more than a day; it is a season, a lifestyle, and a faith that fills our lives with hope. As we journey with the Risen Christ, we encounter him in ways that empower us to align the structures of religion with the depth of our spirituality, restoring a balance that will make us truly Easter People, in the Church, on the streets, in our homes, wherever we may be and in every season. Remember that the Church doesn't have a mission; the mission has a Church. So, don't let Easter fade like the blooms on your Easter Lilly!