

Easter Sunday, 2019  
St. Mark's Episcopal Church  
The Rev. George Smith

---

Happy Easter, Felices Pascuas!

St. Mark's is a multicultural church, where we say Happy Easter to each other in several languages.

In Spanish, Happy Easter is Felices Pascuas. The literal translation is "Happy Easters," plural. And this makes sense, because Easter is not just one day but a season of 50 days, the 50 Great Days of Easter. The number 50 is a representation of perfection – and for those who are turning 50 this year, it is a special year indeed. 50 is derived from 7 times 7, seven being the number for fullness, but not just one seven, but seven sevens, plus one, the cherry on top!

Knowing that Easter is a 50-day celebration, not just one day, can change our reality. Lent was a season of 40 days, Easter is 50. What we celebrate today, this first Sunday of Easter, cannot be contained in one day. Even 50 days is not enough to contain Easter, which is a daily reality, a lifelong journey. St. Augustine wrote, “We are an Easter people.” Easter defines us, resides at our core and remains with us.

The task of the Easter season is twofold: to remember and to make meaning from what we are remembering. Who remembers Fr. Victor’s sermon two weeks ago? (only a few hands are raised...) Remembering takes work. Ironically, in his sermon, Victor talked about what remembering is, which he said isn’t just recalling information but making things present here and now. As the Gospel of Luke tells us, there were half a dozen or more women who had followed Jesus from Galilee to

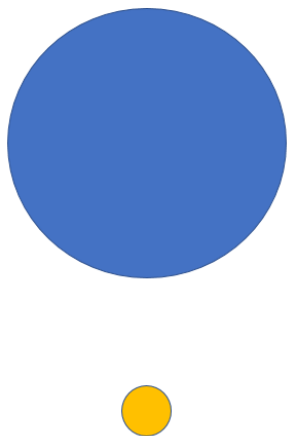
Jerusalem. They were with Jesus when he taught, healed and proclaimed the Kingdom of God. He had told them several times that the Son of Man, that he, Jesus, would be crucified and on the third day, rise again. Why then, on the third day, Easter morning, did they go to the tomb? Why did they bring spices, which are meant for a dead body, not a risen one? The Gospel says that suddenly two men in dazzling white were standing next to the women. Were they angels or deep insight? Whatever they were, they were there to help the women remember what Jesus had taught them about himself. And they did remember. But remembering wasn't enough. It wasn't enough for the other disciples who, except for Peter, didn't get off their butts to go to the tomb or to go look for the risen Jesus. So maybe they remembered, but they didn't believe it or take it seriously to be true or possible. One of the

four Gospels, Mark's Gospel, ends at this point, which puts the responsibility on those hearing the Gospel, meaning us, to go look for Jesus. But Luke's Gospel continues and tells how the risen Jesus himself appeared to two of his followers on the road to a town called Emmaus and then in a room in Jerusalem to the rest of "unremembering" male disciples.

Easter morning is about remembering. That is what we are doing. Easter morning is also about believing that what Jesus said about himself is true, that he would rise on the third day. And that is why we don't come to church with load of spices for a dead body. But Easter morning is also more than remembering and believing – it is about making *meaning* of what we remember and believe. What does it mean that Jesus is risen? We can celebrate it with joyous singing, beautiful flowers, egg hunts and family dinners, but why does it matter?

This is why the Easter season is 50 days – a long time, longer than Lent, where the meaning of the empty tomb begins to take shape.

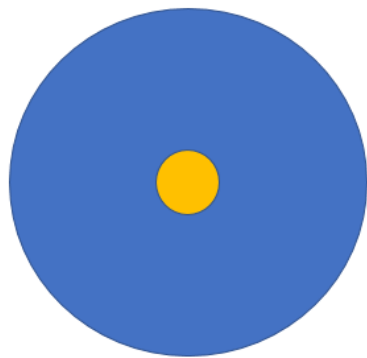
Having remembered what Jesus said, let us start to understand what it means for us and the world. Just like knowing that Easter is 50 days, not 1, it is essential to take a step back and see the context of our world. There are two ways of understanding our relationship with God. The first one is the “Western” or “traditional” understanding. It is represented in



this image of two circles, one large blue circle, and one small yellow circle below it. The blue circle represents God and His Kingdom. The yellow circle represents the earth or more

generally Creation. God, the blue circle is big. The earth, the yellow circle is much smaller. They are separate spheres.

Almost all Western religions have this. God is up there and we are down here. If this is reality, then our relationship with God can be stated as hierarchical, separate and distant. We must shout to God to be heard. If we want to be with God, then we must leave where we are and somehow travel through the gap to get to God. If this is reality, then the meaning of Easter has everything to do with how we “get to God.” This traditional view is deeply embedded in the hearts of minds of Christian people and institutions.

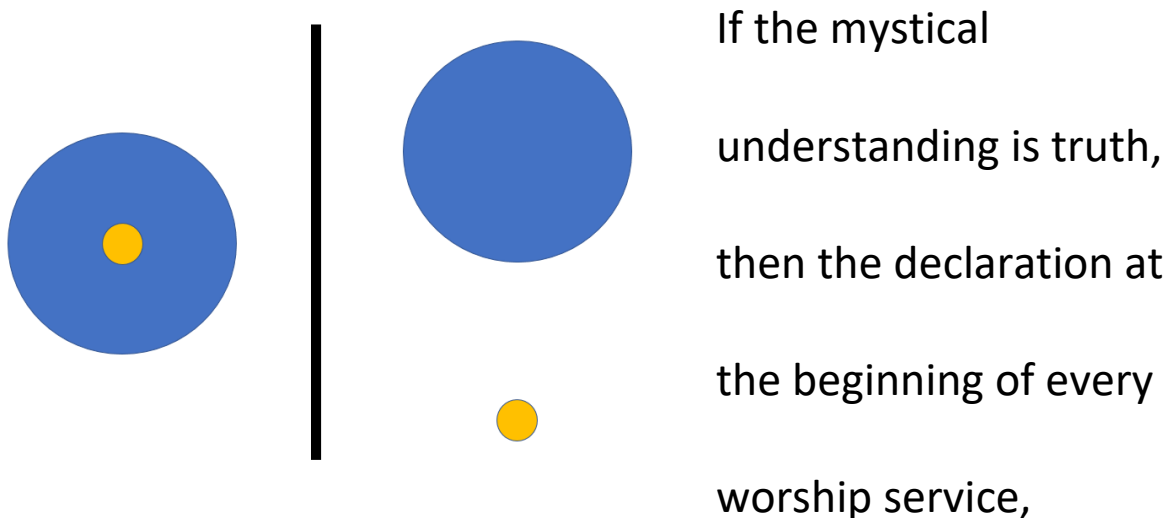


But there is another image I want to show you, which is this one. There are two circles, blue and yellow. But in this image,

the yellow circle is within the blue one. Some call this the “Eastern” or “mystical” truth. If this is reality, then there is no distance between God and Creation. God surrounds us. There is nowhere we can go where God is not present. There is no hierarchy and no need to shout to God to hear us. God is in all and with all.

If reality is the Western understanding, then the meaning of Easter becomes believing in Jesus as the way to board the rocket ship to God. Those who do not believe, will be left behind, eternally separated from God. And the rocket ship has only so many seats on it, which leads to scarcity, rules for who qualifies, and so on. It reinforces the notion that heaven is “up there” where God is.

If reality is the mystical view, then the meaning of Easter becomes believing that the resurrected Jesus, the Son of God, God himself, has not gone away but is here with us and with every human being, eternally alive and present, calling us into relationships and communities that are revealing this truth. On Easter morning, Jesus wasn't resurrected out of Creation but in it and for it.



“Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid...” is not an occasional examination from far away, but a statement of remembering

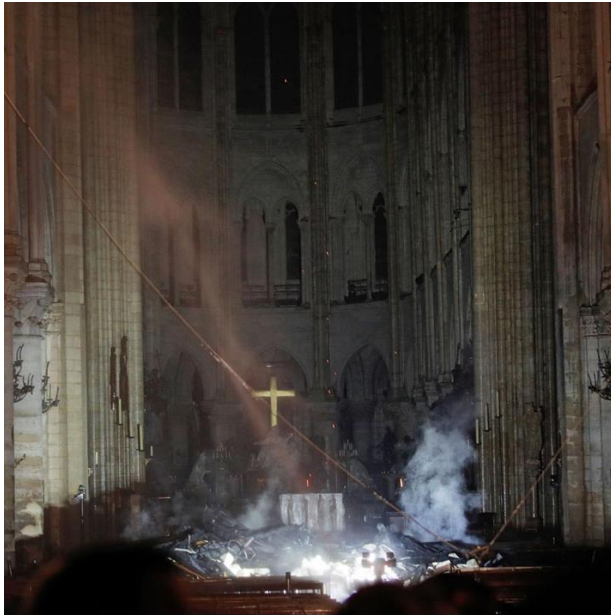


that God is always with us and a part of us in every moment and every situation. When we lift our hearts to God in the prayer during communion, we don't literally lift them up toward a God far away from us. The lifting is actually opening and extending our hearts in all directions.

As the Church (capital C) has lived into the Western understanding, it became hierarchical, mirroring God above and Creation below, with bishops and popes "above" then ordained clergy, then baptized Christians, then everyone else in descending power and importance. Why didn't the men believe the women when they told them that the tomb was empty? But if the Church claims the mystical understanding, then hierarchy is meaningless. We can begin to grasp that life in Christ is one of radical equality. Authority comes from the

living God in our midst as we seek and serve the image of God in each other.

The morning after the fire at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris,



this photograph was taken of the interior of the sanctuary and altar. In the midst of disaster, the altar cross, illuminated by sunlight, still stands upright in the chancel.

The Western voice says that this disaster is a wake-up call to the secular French to guide them to their Christian roots. The mystical voice says that God is present in the destruction, cross or no cross, whether the French go to church on Sundays or not.

The work of Easter is to remember. We have done that. We've heard the Gospel story. We know what Jesus told the women and the men while he was with them in Galilee, that he would be crucified and rise again on the third day, and we have seen that it was true. Now we need to see the meaning and why it matters. And my Easter message to all of us is to break from Western tradition and embrace the mystical reality, which is not new, has always been and always will be, where God in Christ is revealed as forgiveness, mercy, kindness and eternal life – which is what we as the church are to be to each other and show to the world, where everything is connected with everything else, and finding more and more connections so that it is impossible to do anything independent from something else and God.

Amen.