

THE *Episcopal* CHURCH



APRIL 20, 2014 – EASTER DAY

AN EASTER MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDING BISHOP

The tomb is empty, and nobody knows where the body is. Mary Magdalene tells the others about the mysterious disappearance, but they give up and go home. Mary stays behind, weeping, and then fails to recognize the risen one before her. As the days pass, each resurrected encounter begins in surprise or anonymity – the disciples fishing all night without catching, Jesus cooking breakfast on the beach, the two on their way to Emmaus. Nobody recognizes him at first sight.

Clearly the risen body is not identical to the Jesus who was crucified. People mistake him for a stranger. He enters locked rooms. He walks along the path to Emmaus for a long time without being recognized. Crucifixion, death and resurrection result in a transformed body – with evident scars, but changed nonetheless. When he reminds others of God’s banquet, meant for the whole world – when human beings are fed and watered, delivered from prison, gathered from exile across the earth, and healed and reconciled into a community of peace – his companions discover that he has once again been in their midst.

What does that resurrection reality mean for the Body of Christ of which we are part? How does the risen Body of Christ – what we often call the church – differ from the crucified one? That Body seems to be most lively when it lives closer to the reality of Good Friday and the Easter mystery. In the West, that Body has suffered a lot of dying in recent decades. It is diminished, some would say battered, increasingly punctured by apathy and taunted by cultured despisers. That body bears little resemblance to royal images of recent memory – though, like Jesus, it is being mocked. The body remembers and grieves, like the body of Israel crying in the desert, “Why did you bring us out here to die?” or the crucified body who cries, “My God, why have you forsaken me?” or “Why have you abandoned us?” In other contexts the Body of Christ is quite literally dying and spilling its lifeblood – in Pakistan and Sudan, in Iraq and Egypt – and in those ancient words of Tertullian, the blood of martyrs is becoming the seed of the church.

The Body of Christ is rising today where it is growing less self-centered and inwardly focused, and living with its heart turned toward the cosmic and eternal, its attention focused intently on loving God and neighbor. This Body is rising to stand in solidarity with criminals sentenced to death, with widows and orphans, with the people of the land who slave over furrows and lettuce fields to feed the world. This Body can be found passing

through walls and boundaries that have long been misused to keep the righteous “safe” and “pure.” The Body is recognized when the hungry are fed – on the lakeshore with broiled fish, on the road to Emmaus, on street corners and city parks, in food pantries and open kitchens, in feeding neighbor nations and former enemies, and as the Body gathers once again to remember its identity and origin – Christ is risen for the sake of all creation.

Where and how will we look for the Body of Christ, risen and rising? Will we share the life of that body as an Easter people, transformed by resurrection and sent to transform the world in turn?

Christ is risen, Alleluia! Alleluia, Christ is risen indeed!

The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori
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“Sketch of White Lilies” by Bakusen Tsuchida, 1935