



**Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue
in the City of New York**

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www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Sunday, March 27, 2005
The Sunday of the Resurrection

*Solemn Eucharist
at 11am*

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, Rector
on
Saint John 20:1-18
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EASTER DAY 2005

[Mary Magdalene said to Peter and John] "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Welcome to all of you. Whoever you are, this feast is for you. Welcome faithful communicants and members. Welcome occasional visitors and friends. Welcome families and friends of choirboys. Welcome onlookers and guests. If you have kept a faithful Lent, this feast is for you. If you haven't been to church since Christmas, this feast is for you. If this is your first visit to Saint Thomas, or to any church, good – this is for you. If you're back after a while, after a long time, Alleluia. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's gift, on offer to all of us.

Here is a story about a person who received that gift. There was a man who lost his way in life. He thought he understood how the world worked, having given it study and reflection. He had known success in work and social popularity. He had known friendship and affection, even passion. What more could one want? Nevertheless, he felt empty in his soul; there had to be more to life, and he was disturbed that death seems to annihilate everything. He had been exposed to the Church as a youngster, but he had left it behind. Then one day, for no apparent reason, he walked into a church. There was a crucifix that caught his attention. He sat down and gazed at the figure of Jesus on the cross. As he looked and reflected, he lost track of time...

Let us leave our man to his thoughts for a while, and recount a little of what we heard in today's Easter Gospel from Saint John. On the third day after the death of Jesus, a few women from among the disciples went to his tomb at dawn on Sunday. They intended to finish the embalming of his body, which had to be cut short on Friday evening with the onset of the Sabbath, Saturday. No work, certainly no defiling work, could be done by observant Jews on the Sabbath, much less a Sabbath during Passover. So they waited for the first light on Sunday, the third day after Jesus' death and the first day of the new week. But the stone was rolled away from the tomb, and the body of Jesus was not there. No wonder that Mary Magdalene, with the risen Lord standing before her, at first thought he must be the gardener, who had perhaps for some reason moved the body of Jesus from its place.

We are here because of what happened on that morning. There are of course enormous secondary causes and effects: The 2000 year history of the Church is a wonderful thing. Christendom has claimed perhaps the greatest art and architecture and music the world has ever

known. It has inspired perhaps the greatest devotion and poetry, the profoundest theology and philosophy. It has been at the foundation of the political traditions of justice and freedom, of the sanctity and dignity of human life, of care for the weak and the poor. Christianity today is the largest and fastest growing global religion. Yet all this springs from one primary cause; namely, from what took place on the first Easter morning. It was indeed Jesus, Jesus who was crucified, dead and buried, who was standing before Mary Magdalene, speaking to her, saying her name, Mary. She was the first witness of the Resurrection. Then the Lord appeared to many others, including one of the Church's chief opponents, Saul of Tarsus, who then joined the apostles in preaching the Gospel; that is, that Christ died for our sins, and that God raised him from the dead.

Jesus Christ died and rose again. Jesus is Lord. That is the heart and soul of what is called the Gospel, the Good News about Jesus. It seems fair to say that most people, even those who don't like the Church, respect, even admire, the figure or person of Jesus. His teaching, his parables about the Kingdom of God, his mercy, his attention to the outcast and the downtrodden; his signs and wonders; above all the integrity of his whole life culminating in his cross, which symbolizes him most of all; all this has a wonderful power of attraction.

I am here to tell you that Jesus' power to attract is grounded in the bedrock reality of God Almighty. God brought the world to an end on Good Friday. By dying as he did, Jesus nailed the old world and its dead ways to the cross. A new creation was born on Easter. Jesus' tomb was empty because God raised him from death and brought that new world to life. The transformation of the disciples from a circle of perplexed, dismayed, frightened little people into the bold, joyful, convinced witnesses of Jesus Christ is the first measurable evidence of the power that raised Jesus from the dead. The effect of their witness can be seen here and now.

Now let us return to the man in the church reflecting upon the crucifix, the man who had lost his way in life. He lost track of the time as he sat and looked and considered the figure of Jesus on the cross. Christ crucified looked so dead and defeated... The man forgot about the time, because he felt something: was it a suggestion of prayer? Then he remembered some words of Jesus from the church days of his youth: "If you would come after me, you must deny yourself and take up your own cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it. What does it profit, to gain the whole world and to lose your own soul? For what will you give in exchange for your soul?" Jesus seemed to speak to the man's emptiness, as he spoke to Mary in the garden. Was Jesus calling his name? The man left the Church. Only a half hour had passed. Yet a weight had been lifted from him. He did not feel, as he had a half hour before, weary. In fact, he felt energy; he walked more lightly. The man wondered about God. He thought: Christ lives.

That man caught a glimpse of the new world that came into existence on Good Friday and Easter. I tell you his story, because whoever you are, I want you to know that same new life and joy. I want you to hear Jesus call your name.

Episcopalians are not famous for direct evangelism; nevertheless, I invite you into the glorious world of Jesus Christ, Christ who died for our sins, Christ who is risen from the dead, Christ who lives and will never die again. This is Reality, the Gospel of God, and it really is the best news there is!

Now let me hear you do the Easter shout. Alleluia. Christ is risen! *The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.