



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

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www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Sunday, April 8, 2007
Easter Day

Solemn Eucharist
at 11am

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, Rector
on
Acts 10:34-43
Colossians 3:1-4
Saint Luke 24:1-10
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LOVE IS STRONGER THAN DEATH

Alleluia. Christ is risen. *The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia.*

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

Welcome to the greatest feast of the Christian Church. Welcome to those of you who have made a devout observance of Lent and Holy Week, who prepared for this day and for whom Easter is a joyous fulfillment. Welcome to our church and choir school staff, my colleagues, clergy and lay people, and to our volunteers, who work hard and with loving care to make these services run in good order and to extend hospitality to the hundreds, actually thousands, who attend them. Welcome to our Choir School families, who come from near and far on Easter so their sons can sing the Lord's praises. Welcome not only to our regular, familiar faces, but also to occasional attendees, long distance members and friends, visitors, strangers, tourists. This is the feast of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It is for all of us. Wherever you are on the spectrum of faith, including lack of faith, this is for you.

Recall from Saint Luke's Gospel, which we just heard, why the women went to Jesus' tomb on that first Easter, at early dawn. They were bringing prepared spices so they could finish Jesus' burial, work that was delayed by the onset of the Sabbath on Friday evening, after his dead body was taken down from the cross, wrapped in linen, and put into a new sepulcher hewn in the rock [courtesy of Joseph of Arimathea, a member of Jerusalem's ruling council and a secret disciple of Jesus]. The women found the great stone at the door of the tomb rolled away. While they were perplexed not to find Jesus' body, two men stood by them in shining garments; and as the women bowed their faces down to the earth in fear, the men said, "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen."

The Resurrection of Jesus on the third day after his crucifixion under Pontius Pilate is the mighty act of God which created and continues to create Christendom, two billion people strong around the globe. Before we go on with our celebrating, let me emphasize two points.

The first is that Christ's suffering and death were necessary. His Crucifixion is just as much part of God's plan as is his Resurrection. As he appeared alive and victorious from the other side of death, Christ said this, one way or another, every time he appeared. Today

the angels told the women at the tomb to remember how Jesus had said the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. We look at the crucifix and naturally ask, why? Why did this have to happen? How could they do that to him? Some honest reflection might lead us to modify that last question: How could people like us do that to him, of all people?

This leads to the second point. The necessity of the cross stems from the fact that God is love and has made creatures in his image to love as well. For love to exist there must be freedom. Love is not automatic; it is a gift freely given. By making us free, “angels and men in a wonderful order,” the loving God takes the risk involved in our power to choose not to love in return, the risk of sin and consequent death. God has known from all eternity the cost of that risk, and he has known perfectly well that only he could pay it. His Son’s cross was no surprise to him. Yes, it is terrible, what sinners (like us) can do. But love is stronger; it conquers all, even sin and death. Jesus rose from the grave because it was impossible for death to hold him. (See Acts 2:24)

Easter is the vindication of God’s self-giving love. Easter is the Good News that God is love; that God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son. The cross is Jesus’ life’s work, the culmination of his ministry, and his glorification. Knowing that he was going to his cross, Jesus said this to his perplexed, frightened disciples at his Last Supper with them in the Upper Room: “My command is this: Love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. This is my command: Love one another.”¹

When I was a college student I rediscovered my faith in Christ through being apprehended by a vision of the cross. I did not at the time think I believed in God; it was the crucified Lord who opened the heavens for me. What moved me, and still does, is that *Christ crucified reveals, embodies God, in self-giving love.*

I don’t know how people manage to get through this life without faith in God and the hope that faith engenders; I remember the emptiness of what it is like to be without faith. But there is something more basic, the lack of which is far worse than the lack of faith, and that is the lack of love. Those who love are born of God and know God, for God is love. Those who do not love do not know God. Those who love are never far from God, no matter what the condition of their faith. The Apostle Paul famously wrote to some Christians who were divisively proud of their faith: Faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.²

The reason love is the greatest, greater than hope and faith, is that the time will come when faith and hope will yield to sight. When you and I at last lay down the burden of the flesh and go to God in death, we will see him as he is. Every eye will see him, as Doubting Thomas saw the risen Lord whom he loved, wounds and all. Faith will yield to sight but we will still need love, because we will be with God. Nothing unloving will last in heaven; nothing unloving can be there at all.

Let us celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus and prepare for the day when we shall see him face to face: Let love be re-born in our hearts, in the place where good will is conceived and moves us to heed his command: Love one another, as I have loved you. That’s how it is known that we are Christians, and that this is a Christian Church. “By this all men will know you are my disciples, that you have love for one another.”

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

¹ St. John 15:12-17

² I Corinthians 13:1-13