

Isaiah 25:6-9; Acts 10:34-43; Mark 16:1-8
Easter Sunday

He Is Not Here^{*}

The Rev. Dr. Patrick S. Cheng
Episcopal Church of Our Savior, New York City
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Alleluia! Christ is Risen! 哈利路亞! 基督已經復活了!

Happy Easter! It's a great honor and blessing to be here today. Many thanks to Fr. Noel for the invitation to celebrate and preach on this Resurrection Sunday.

It's great to see a number of friends who are here today. And I'm delighted that my Mom can be here today as well.

In today's gospel reading from Mark, we hear about the reaction of the first witnesses to the resurrection and the empty tomb – all of them faithful women – on that very first Easter morning.

What was their reaction? Was it overwhelming joy? Was it excitement? Was it delight? No. It was fear. “For they were afraid.” 因為他們害怕。

When the women arrive at the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus, they find that the stone at the entrance had been rolled away. They meet an angelic figure who tells them that Jesus is not there. “He has been raised; he is not here.” 他已經復活了, 不在這裏。

So they run away. They “fled from the tomb.” 他們從墳墓那裏逃跑。 They were terrified. They were afraid. 他們發抖。 他們害怕。

Now it might seem odd that these women's first reaction to something as wonderful as the resurrection is fear. But I can relate to their reaction.

As some of you know, I recently moved back to New York City after spending almost five years in the Boston area. While I was there, I was a seminary professor, and I served happily at Emmanuel Church, an Episcopal Church in downtown Boston, for over two years.

Yes, I was excited to return to New York City to work for the national Episcopal Church. But it was also very hard to leave a parish that I loved. It was even harder not to have a place to serve regularly on Sundays.

You see, I had left Boston without first finding a new parish home in New York City. I had expected to celebrate and preach in Boston for years to come, but all of a sudden I was without a place to exercise my sacramental ministry.

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It was as if something had died within me. In fact, I felt that my priestly ministry had been buried in a tomb.

Some time ago, Fr. Noel invited me to celebrate and preach on Easter Sunday. I couldn't believe my ears. "You want me to celebrate and preach on Easter?" To me, Fr. Noel was like the angelic young man dressed in white in our gospel reading. He reminded me that the stone had been rolled away and that the tomb was empty. 石頭已經滾開了. 墳墓是空的.

Indeed, as our first reading from the Book of Isaiah reminds us, God will "swallow up death forever" and will "wipe away the tears from all faces."

So what was my first reaction to this invitation? Was it overwhelming joy? Was it excitement? Was it delight? No. It was fear. 因為我害怕. For I was afraid.

How could I, a relative stranger to this parish, celebrate and preach on this most significant day of the liturgical year? I speak Mandarin Chinese, not Cantonese! And my Chinese isn't that good anyway. What could I possibly have to say to this congregation? What if I'm boring? What if I mess up? I wanted to flee from the invitation.

It's not surprising that sometimes our first reaction to an empty tomb is fear. Why? Because sometimes when we learn that our deepest hopes and dreams have been realized, we then realize the enormity of the task that lies ahead of us.

It's like the saying: "Be careful what you wish for." Because it might just come true.

It's a big responsibility for us as Christians to live in a world where Jesus Christ has been raised. It is true: he is not here. 他不在這裏. But it also means that we must live up to our baptismal vows to be the Body of Christ right here on earth.

Teresa of Avila – the sixteenth-century mystic who recently had the 500th anniversary of her birth – once wrote:

"Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours."

It is both an incredible gift and an incredible responsibility to be the Body of Christ. And yet there is no reason to be afraid. For we are not alone. We are in this all together.

Even though the women at the tomb "said nothing to anyone" at first – 甚麼也不告訴人 – they did eventually tell the disciples and Peter. And thank goodness they found the courage to do so.

If they had not told the Good News to others, we would not be celebrating Easter Sunday today, some two thousand years later. As Peter proclaims in our second reading from the Book of Acts, Jesus Christ has "commanded us to preach to the people." 他吩咐我們傳道給眾人.

In a moment we will be renewing our baptismal vows. I invite you to reflect upon what it means to live in a world in which the tomb is empty and where Christ is risen. What does it mean for you to be the body, the hands, the feet, and the eyes of Christ? Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

He has been raised; he is not here. 他已經復活了, 不在這裏. Do not be alarmed. 不要驚恐. Do not be terrified. 不要發抖. Do not fear. 不要害怕.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! 哈利路亞! 基督已經復活了!

Amen. 阿們.