

## Easter 3.31.24

There is a tradition practiced among Christians at Easter time. When someone says, ***Christ is risen!*** We respond, ***He is risen, indeed!***

Let's try that...

If you're a fan of old TV shows, you might remember an actor by the name of Michael Landon. Michael Landon starred in shows like Bonanza and Little House on the Prairie.

Late one evening, I remember seeing Michael Landon being interviewed on the Tonight Show by Johnny Carson, the host of that show. He relayed this story to Johnny Carson and the audience.

Landon stated that he had a rather large family. He and his wife had nine children. They lived in a rural part of California. They lived on a ranch surrounded by a few neighbors. Landon was always worried that one of his kids or their many pets were going to do something to upset or offend one of his neighbors. For that reason, he always agreed to help a neighbor when asked. He wanted to stay on their good side, especially when there was the possibility that either the many animals on their ranch or one of his children would act up or do something crazy on his neighbor's property.

One day, a neighbor of Landon asked him to watch his house for a few days. He and his family were going on a trip. He said he had a few animals in and around the house and asked that Landon care for them. "Sure thing," Michael responded.

On the morning his neighbor was to return from his trip, Michael Landon went out his front door. There on the porch was one of his kid's dogs. And in the mouth of the dog was a dead rabbit – the neighbor's pet rabbit. It was covered with dirt and seemed to be in rough shape. The dog proudly set the rabbit at Landon's feet.

Panic-stricken, he took the dead rabbit inside the house. He shampooed it. He then took a blow dryer out to fluff up the rabbit's fur. When he thought the rabbit was somewhat presentable, he went over to the neighbor's house. He put new hay in the rabbit's hutch and dutifully laid out the rabbit on the hay.

Later that night, his neighbor returned home. He came over to Landon's house a little while later. The neighbor said, "the weirdest thing happened while I was away."  
"Uh-oh," Landon thought. "I'm busted. I'm in trouble."

The neighbor described how, when he returned home and passed by the rabbit's hutch, he saw the rabbit laid out on some newly strewn hay. "Here it comes," Landon thought. And just when he was about to fess up to what happened, the neighbor said, "Now this is the weird part. The day we left for our trip. Our rabbit died and I buried it in the backyard. I'm not sure how it happened, but there it was – clean, fluffy, and looking fine – like it had risen from the dead. But it was still dead."

Landon never admitted what had happened or what he did until he relayed that story on national TV that evening.

When we think about the resurrection of Christ which we celebrate today, we might think that Jesus was simply restored to his former self. But the resurrection of Christ was something extraordinary. The description of the burial cloths in found in today's gospel implies that something incredible and unusual happened there. The burial cloths retained the shape of Jesus' body. It was as if he had passed through that cloth. And the cloth that covered his head was rolled up and put in another place altogether. Unlike the rabbit that was just fluffed up, Jesus was truly risen. If someone intended to steal Jesus' body, the cloths would be strewn on the ground. They wouldn't have the shape they did and be placed where they were found.

In later post-resurrection gospel accounts, we'll hear about how the disciples and many others personally encountered the resurrected Christ. They knew it was Jesus. He spoke with them and they could touch his body. Although his body bore the horrific marks of crucifixion, he was very much alive.

In one encounter for example, following the crucifixion and death of Christ, the disciples fled to the Upper Room. They were filled with fear, thinking that they would experience the same fate as Jesus. Knowing their fear, Jesus came to be with them. But he came into that room through a door that was locked. His body was real and tangible. Yet, it was altogether different.

During that encounter, we also hear that Jesus breathed on his disciples. The disciples would recall at that moment the life-breath that God the Father blew into Adam when he created him. They would associate that experience with what Jesus was doing for them now. Jesus' breath descending upon the disciples would be a source of strength for those fear-filled men. It enabled them to speak new languages and boldly witness the Good News without feeling afraid or ashamed.

Jesus even ate with his disciples. In the story called the ***Road to Emmaus***, Jesus gathered with the disciples in a room for supper. He explained the scriptures to them as they journeyed to Emmaus. His teaching and preaching were so powerful that they said their hearts were "burning" with love for the Lord. When they got to the room where they were staying for the evening, Jesus offered the same blessing and prayers over the bread that he gave at the Last Supper. Jesus was really and truly the center of their Eucharistic gathering. In the same way, Jesus is really and truly present to us as we pray this evening and recall those same words and perform those same actions over the bread and wine at the altar.

In today's gospel account, Mary Magdalene was the first to give witness to this incredible event. Peter and John who peered into the tomb also gave testimony to many about what they saw and what they experienced – that Christ truly was risen from the dead.

What the risen Christ witnessed and gave to his disciples after his resurrection, he does for us – in this place and at this time. Death could not hold back or defeat our Savior. Believing in him, we are no longer slaves to sin and death as well.

Friends, the resurrection is real. And the writing of the disciples in the scriptures and their faithful witness validate that reality. Furthermore, resurrection is not something that touches us only when we die. It is a power-force in our lives right now – freeing us from sin, strengthening us in our moments of weakness, and making us bold in witnessing to him.

May the power of Christ's resurrection take hold of our hearts, strengthen our drooping spirits, and empower us to faithfully and boldly share his Good News all our days.

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