



# SAINT LUKE'S

## "THE HEARTBEAT OF GOD"

EASTER DAY

ACTS 10:34-43

PSALM 118

1 CORINTHIANS 15:19-26

JOHN 20:1-18

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY

APRIL 16, 2017

The Resurrection is not a church invention. If it was, it would be more... churchy. Jesus would have appeared first to Peter and probably in the Temple in Jerusalem. Instead, Jesus appears first to a woman. To Mary Magdalene – the Mary who Jesus released from a living hell of isolation and shame and gossipy judgment by others. Much attention has been paid to Whom Jesus first appears. But what about the Where? Jesus seeks out Mary Magdalene in a cemetery. Artists have painted beautiful pictures of lush green gardens. But it is a cemetery. Only John tells us Jesus appears first at his own grave.

None of the recorded Resurrection events happen at authorized holy places. Jesus comes to fishermen in their boats out on the water, catching nothing.<sup>1</sup> Jesus comes alongside people in despair, walking home to Emmaus after their leader was executed and their movement has failed.<sup>2</sup> Jesus finds his disciples wherever they are, whatever they are doing, and however they are feeling. Jesus is no longer limited by place or time. Wherever the disciples are found by Jesus, the ground *becomes* holy as their lives change forever.

This matters because without intending to, the church has sometimes packaged the Resurrection in a way that boxes in its meaning and can make the Resurrection of Jesus seem less accessible and relevant than it is. As the institutional church evolves, the primacy of St. Peter generates a framework that defines orthodoxy, especially where God is and where God isn't. Other voices even within Scripture are de-emphasized. One of these is the unique voice of John. Just as Jesus comes to Mary

<sup>1</sup> Jn. 21:1-8f.

<sup>2</sup> Lk. 24:13f.

Magdalene alone and intimately, the spirituality of John centers on personal encounter with Jesus. John's gospel tells us about the disciple who Jesus loved, who is John himself.<sup>3</sup> John alone tells us about the footwashing at the Last Supper.<sup>4</sup> Jesus instructs the disciples to love one another, then he picks up a towel and kneels before them and says: *Like this*, as he takes their feet in his hands. John leans on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper - John is so close to Jesus that he can hear the heartbeat of God. Jesus entrusts his own Mother to John as he is dying. John is at the tomb today, running alongside Peter. Only John will tell us about Thomas who Jesus invites to touch his wounds, his hands and side: *Put your finger here...Reach out your hand and put it in my side.*<sup>5</sup> So tactile, real, embodied, intimate.

The spiritual communities descending from John stay relational and close to nature. The John tradition flowers in remote Celtic monasteries like Iona and Lindisfarne, so isolated that they develop in parallel to the tradition of St. Peter and Rome.<sup>6</sup> The monks have special soul friends whom they love: *anam chara*. In Celtic prayers, God is not confined to church buildings and sacraments - Creation is God's church. Celtic prayers are holistic, full of mystical communion with God through Creation.

St. Francis is another spectacular example of John's spirituality. Francis speaks of Creation as one family - Brother Sun and Sister Moon. In John, the world is created essentially good, not sinful or evil. *The light that enlightens every person* is within us and the darkness has not

<sup>3</sup> John 13:23; 19:26 ; 20:2; 21:7; 21:20

<sup>4</sup> John 13

<sup>5</sup> John 20:27

<sup>6</sup> Rome finally triumphs over the Celtic traditions at the Synod of Whitby in 664

overcome it.<sup>7</sup> We are born with essential goodness, covered over by acts of sin. Jesus' birth is not the "cure" for human sin. God becomes human to share God's love most fully with us by becoming like us. Jesus is born to release the light within us. The Resurrection continues our liberation by Jesus into ever greater life and light.

If you are like St. John or St. Francis or Mary Magdalene you may encounter Jesus at the dinner table, or in Creation, or at a gravesite – wherever your heart is most open to hearing and seeing afresh. Listen for the heartbeat of God especially in the empty places, the tombs in your life. The holy gardener surprises us when we least expect him. Please don't be embarrassed to share your faith or your experience of Jesus. Our chaotic and wounded world desperately needs to hear about our faith. And please don't worry that your words aren't "churchy" enough. The world needs our faith just as it is and in our own stumbling, halting words. Amid all the terrible things happening in our world, Jesus offers a different way of life, real hope, true joy and profound peace.

This is the truly trustworthy news: The Resurrection of Jesus is the beginning of a new world. Time, sickness, even death is no longer our enemy. Jesus is the first fruits of the New Creation. As Jesus is today, so we will be. Alleluia.

AMEN

<sup>7</sup> John 1:3-5,9,16







THE CHURCH OF ST. LUKE IN THE FIELDS  
487 HUDSON STREET  
NEW YORK, NY 10014

TEL: 212.924.0562

FAX: 212. 633.2098

WEB SITE: [WWW.STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG](http://WWW.STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG)

EMAIL: [INFO@STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG](mailto:INFO@STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG)