

Easter Sermon, Year B  
The Rev. Ian Burch  
St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI  
April 1, 2018

Alleluia, Christ is Risen!

I know a thing or two about winter. I grew up in the snow. I went to college in the snow. I attended seminary in the snow. And now I live in Wisconsin. Maybe I'll retire in Miami, but for the foreseeable future, I'm in a long term relationship with winter.

Wisconsinites follow winter through the same script each year—the elation of the first snow through the joys of Christmas, settling into the doldrums of February, then landing in the despair of March. When will spring come?

Toward the end of the winter, there's usually one day—sometimes in late February or even in March when the thermometer hits about 49 degrees, and it's sunny. The snow might still be on the ground, and any meteorologist will tell you that we're nowhere near spring.

Even so, on that one, beautiful late winter day, a runner will appear. She's maybe at the lakefront, or in the park, or running up Newberry in shorts and a tank-top, while the rest of us put on parkas for the 100th time. Each year I see her, no hat, no gloves, running as if she's on a beach in Hawaii. Sometimes she wears sunglasses, which seem out of place compared to my mittens.

I think she's crazy. Forty-nine degrees is not THAT warm. What is she thinking running in shorts and a tanktop through the cold?

The older I get, the more I think she is on to something. A well-known theologian, Jurgen Moltmann, once remarked that “without women preachers, we would have no knowledge of the resurrection.” I think these winter runners are preaching to us about something they have seen or felt in the air, even when the rest of us are not so sure. They possess a special insight into spring that maybe we are too winterized to access.

And, of course, that's what Mary Magdalene has done for the world and the resurrection. She is the first one to recognize Jesus has risen from the dead, and she goes on to tell all the disciples that what Jesus promised to do, he has done. The tomb is empty and the stone is rolled away. And we wouldn't know this story at all if not for the faith and hope of Mary Magdalene. She's our spiritual winter runner—knowing that the world is changed before the rest of us do.

It's hard to live on the cusp of spring. Just ask anyone who is eager to get seeds in the ground or to put their sweaters away for the season. Though, that is exactly what we do as Christians. We proclaim the resurrection of Jesus for the healing of the world even when the world can seem cold and bleak. It takes a lot of bravery to look out at the snowy landscape and say with confidence that death and winter don't have the last word, that the Son of God has triumphed. Where is the Son of God when schools are shot up or when people in our city and state don't have enough to eat, can't afford to clothe their children, can't access medicine or safe housing? I imagine that someone who reads the news every day would look at us this morning with puzzlement. Why all the flowers and songs and trumpet when the affairs of the world are so bleak? Where is the resurrection that these crazy Christians are talking about? Life can look a lot like winter, and proclaiming spring seems foolish.

Faith can look a little foolish. Running through the snow in shorts can look a little foolish. I imagine people thought the earliest Christians were a little foolish. That's okay. I don't mind being a fool for God on this holy Easter morning.

The signs of resurrection are everywhere if we're brave enough to look, if we can put on a pair of shorts, even when it's still chilly outside. Resurrection is much more than a resuscitation two thousand years ago. Resurrection is a brave posture that we assume toward life. Resurrection is a spiritual practice. It is the audacity to believe that God has saved this crazy world and loves it in all its imperfections. It's the belief that God isn't finished working on this lonely planet.

Look at the people of God who come together week after week to share the stories of our faith and to share bread and wine together in peace. Jesus is alive in that act. Look at the generations that we have welcomed into the family of God with baptismal water and with holy oil. Jesus is alive in that. Look at the teachings of the church that command us to see every human person as a little bit of the divine and worthy of love, of justice, of compassion. Jesus is alive in every soul we encounter. And each time we counter the forces of death in the world, we say with Mary Magdalene. "I have seen the Lord."

So yes, on this Easter morning, it's fair to say that Christians are a little crazy. We run in the snow in our shorts, shouting to anyone who will listen that Christ is Risen and that death is not the final answer. We take Mary Magdalene as our guide and our saint. She had the audacity to walk up to the grieving disciples and say, "I have seen the Lord." What wonderful bravery. Are there places in your life where you are being called to proclaim that Jesus is alive? Mary was not a priest. She was not a deacon. She wasn't even a Christian. She had no education and no money. But she was a witness to God's power. You can do that. And for the sake of this world that is hurting, you MUST do that.

Be an Easter preacher like Mary Magdalene. Tell the story of Palm Sunday, with the donkey and Jesus marching with the poor. Tell the story of Maundy Thursday, with Jesus teaching us to love one another and showing us how to be servants of even those who might one day betray us. Tell the story of the cross with its senseless violence and the cowardice of the powerbrokers of the day. And tell the story of this morning. Of the empty tomb. Of the risen Christ. Of the faith and determination of Mary Magdalene. Put on your shorts, even when it feels like winter, because you are a foolish and brave people of faith. Happy Easter. Alleluia. Amen.