

Third Sunday of Easter, Year B
The Rev. Ian Burch
St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI
April 18, 2021

On Friday I drove down to South Bend, Indiana to speak at the ordination of one our own — Kirsten Guidero, whom many of you know from her years at St. Mark's. Kirsten discerned for the priesthood in this community before moving to accept a position teaching Theology in Indiana. She has since completed her requirements for the priesthood, which she joined yesterday morning at a beautiful service in the Diocese of Northern Indiana.

I walked into the cathedral in South Bend yesterday morning to find the organist practicing, the deacon arranging the gospel book, the priests prepping the sanctuary, and the bishop standing in the middle of it all ready to lead us in a dress rehearsal for the service. Pews were roped off for very limited guests. Everyone was masked. The liturgy was kept short, and we all communed with just the bread, saving the wine for a time when COVID is less a part of our lives. All these precautions I suppose could have threatened the joy of the day, but instead, I think they gave us a sense of the resilience of Christianity community in the face of adversity.

And why should we not be resilient. Jesus appears to the disciples in this morning's gospel after being ACTUALLY dead, and if that isn't the very definition of resilience, then I don't know what is.

Death is real. Look at the shootings in Indianapolis. Look at the COVID-19 death count from the last year. Look at the murders of George Floyd or Adam Toledo. Death is real, big, scary, and ubiquitous.

And what has God given us to fight death with? A bunch of Christian people in masks standing in a Cathedral on a Saturday morning, welcoming a new priest into her ministry? A bunch of Christian people sitting (on Zoom and praying from their homes) in masks on folding chairs in a courtyard in Wisconsin? What kind of army is this when you think about the forces that kill and destroy the people of God?

We are the least armed, least trained, least hierarchical army the world has ever seen. And we are also the most powerful, because in the Easter season Jesus appears to us as an explosive form of life after the cold days in the grave.

Sure, we can't do a lot of the things we used to. And sure, even when we ordain a new priest, everything has to be wiped down and monitored and masked. And sure we need to spend a few Sundays in the courtyard. But with the power of the living Jesus in our very midst, I think these are minor hurdles. What is a mask and a folding chair compared to the resurrection of Jesus?

Now that Kirsten is a priest, she will spend her days along with her colleagues, not being a shepherd exactly, but pointing to Jesus, the good shepherd for all of us. When we become numb to terrible news on the television, she will point us to the power of the living Jesus among us. When we are weary of COVID-19 restrictions, she will point to the power of the living Jesus

among us. And when our hearts are weary of the violence done to our sisters and brothers of color, she will point to the power of Jesus among us.

And when we are reminded of the animating grace of Jesus living in our community, there is nothing we cannot do. We can make the world look a little more like the kingdom of God. We can heal the sick and tend to the poor. We can find injustice and root it out, all in the name of Jesus. And we can do all that without violence and without despair.

I appreciate that this can seem a little vague. I'm saying that we are a pacifist army for good, enlivened by Jesus, but what does that actually mean? Practically? Daily? The specifics of your day probably look different from mine and from your neighbor, but regardless of where you live out your Christian life, the first rule of the Easter season is that every person you encounter is, in fact, part of the risen Christ. You are not looking at beggars or victims or inconvenient people. You are looking at souls that Christ has loved enough to return from the dead. And that knowledge will affect how you interact with other, how you use your economic power, how you use your political power, how you vote, and even how you apologize and ask for forgiveness. There is no part of your life that is not changed because of what Jesus did on Easter.

So, yes, it may seem that a couple of rag tag groups of Christians can't do much. But that's a bet you should never take. With the resurrected Jesus here in our midst, we can do anything. For two thousand years, we have been trying to bring the world closer to the kingdom of God, and I see no reason not to keep it up. Amen.