

The Resurrection of our Lord  
April 1, 2018  
Mark 16:1-8

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### **Corporate Practice: Celebration**

Grace to you and peace from our loving God, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

What else is there to say! [Sit.]

[As you rise after a few seconds.] April Fools!

Alright. On to the serious stuff.

It is no coincidence that we reflect together on this high holy day of Easter on the spiritual practice of celebration. Yes. I am saying that celebration is a spiritual practice, and I want to be in a mode of celebration with you this morning even as I speak about the ways to exercise this spiritual practice well and fully.

Since I haven't seen all of you at every worship service during Lent (☺), a bit of context may be helpful. All during this season of Lent, beginning with Ash Wednesday, we have considered on Wednesdays and Sundays a full twelve different spiritual practices that the church has found particularly beneficial over the centuries.

We started with four inward practices—meditation, prayer, fasting, and study. We then turned to the outward practices—simplicity, solitude, submission, and service. And we rounded things out with four corporate practices—confession, worship, guidance, and, today, celebration.

It has been a blessed journey through Lent, considering and employing these differing practices in our lives as ways to deepen our walk with Jesus and enhance the grace of our speech, our witness, our living, and our acts of mercy, justice, peace, and forgiveness. It has been gratifying to hear how many of you have experimented with various of these spiritual practices and how they have been a struggle as well as a blessing to you.

Unlike many of the practices we have engaged—like meditation, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, and service, today's practice is a welcome and readily grasped one. Everyone enjoys celebrating. Every human being needs to stop and smell the roses, and to revel in the gifts of God.

What better practice to put forward on this Easter Day than celebration!

St. Augustine said: “The Christian should be an Alleluia from head to foot!

Celebration is at the heart of the way of Christ. He entered our world on a high note of jubilation; “I bring you good news of a great joy,” cried the angel, “which shall come to all the people”(Luke 2:10). He left the world bequeathing his joy to the disciples: “These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

Jesus proclaimed a world transformed by a justice defined by mercy, forgiveness, and peace—what he called the Kingdom of God. The poor are to receive the good news, the captives are to be released, the blind are to receive sight, and the oppressed are to be liberated. His vision was a vision of restoration and of joy. Of Resurrection!

Some suggest that we have all but lost the carefree spirit of joyous festivity. Apathy and melancholy dominate our times. One writer says that in our day we are pressed “so hard toward useful work and rational calculation (we have) all but forgotten the joy of ecstatic celebration...” (Harvey Cox).

Let’s try to turn the tide of our downer world with another declaration of the transformative news of this day!

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

Surely this is a major reason that Easter is so popular. Celebration brings joy into life, and joy makes us strong. Scripture even says so: “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:10). We cannot continue long in anything without it. Women endure childbirth because the joy of motherhood lies on the other side. Young married couples struggle through the difficult years because they value the blessedness of a long life together. Parents hold steady through the teen years, knowing—or hoping—that their children will emerge at the other end human once again. 😊

Joy, and the hope of joy, is what sustains us. The little deaths of everyday living are borne because we anticipate and hope that joy will be restored. “Weeping may tarry for the night,” says the Psalmist, “but joy comes with the morning.” (30:5). I can’t tell you how much strength I garner from so many of you when I am honored to visit with you in your homes or in the hospital or in a place of rehabilitation. I see so often the strength of the Lord carrying you along in a time of trouble. And I witness the shining light of hope in your eyes, and in your words. When one suffers, all suffer together. And when one rejoices, we rejoice together. We are each of us, more often than we likely know, signs of joy and celebration and resurrection to one another. What great treasures God provides to us as we gather to celebrate—and hold up those who may not yet be ready to celebrate—in the trust and faith that God always leads us along the paths of righteousness and joy.

It may not be necessary to comment on the distinction between happiness and joy. But I will anyway. They are not the same thing. Happiness is a momentary state of self-satisfaction, pleasure, or contentment. It is usually accompanied by some event that inspires gratitude, appreciation, or fulfillment.

Joy, in the religious and biblical sense is an entirely different matter. Joy is deeper. It is not necessarily a response to an external stimulus or event. It is not contingent on things going well or aesthetic input or the realization of a goal.

Joy may be present within us even in the midst of trouble or illness or tragedy. It has to do with that immovable center we have discussed so often in the past six weeks. It springs from the portable sanctuary in our hearts that is created and nurtured through our practice of God's abiding presence. It is that invisible grappling hook of the Holy Spirit originating in the heart of God and embedded in our souls—somewhere, perhaps, around the solar plexus—or the heart. It is there at the seat of our vitality—where the blood pumps and the wind of the spirit sustains life. Joy does not bypass our pain, it transforms it, redeems it, moves through and beyond it.

Do you know what I'm talking about. Oh, I pray that you do.

For the joy of this day, the cause and source of our celebration in the resurrection of our Lord can be known profoundly and deeply and poignantly in our very bodies as fully as it is known on this day in our communal celebrations of Easter Breakfast and triumphant instrumental and choral music and hymnic exultations punctuated by the quintessential expression of spiritual praise. Alleluia!

Shall we do it again? Oh, why not?

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

All during Lent, we have been giving time and effort to the development of spiritual practices in our daily lives. All of those practices—worship and service, prayer and meditation, study and simplicity—they are all intended not to burden us with more things to do in our busy lives. They are the tried and true ways, suggested in scripture, that lead us into new freedoms, new fulfillment, and—yes, you guessed it—true joy. The way of our Lord, even through Gethsemane and Golgotha, was the way towards new life, new joys—resurrection. So it is for us. Our Lord walks alongside us, leading away from and through the death-dealing ways of the world and into the paths of purpose and joy. Christ is alongside us. The Spirit dwells within us. And almighty God watches over us. All to bring us from death to life. All to encourage, equip, and empower us to live in the power of the resurrection.

You know, St. Paul exhorts us in Philippians to “Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice” (4:4). I am absolutely certain that he meant it. So, let’s sing it—in a round. Do you know it? Good. When I point to your section of chairs I want you to start. Sing it through three times so we can get all the way around and fully hear the harmonies. With gusto, now! [Do it, including the choir.]

Okay. One more time:

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

[Based on Richard J. Foster’s “Celebration of Discipline”]