

# Alleluia! Christ is risen!



April 1, 2017

Dear friends,

The philosopher and Jewish theologian Martin Buber encouraged people “to read the Bible as if they had never seen it.” This is sage advice as we come to celebrate Easter ... yet again. Many of us have heard the story so many times that perhaps it is a challenge to find new life in this story about New Life. Is there anything new to hear, anything fresh to learn? What’s new and life-giving for us this year in this old, old story?

Sometimes it is the surprising, head-scratching parts of scripture that help make the story fresh for us. Consider this incident in the story of the arrest, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus:

In the Gospel of Mark, following the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, the author tells us that

*...a young man followed [Jesus], with nothing but a linen cloth about his body; and they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked. (Mk. 14:51-52; RSV).*

Pause for a moment and ask yourself: How many sermons about the Passion and the Resurrection have I heard that used this text as the basis for the sermon? Not too many, I’ll wager! It’s a curious story detail that none of the other Gospel writers chose to include, and so many questions come to mind:

- Who *was* this nameless young man?
- Why is he left nameless?
- Had he been following Jesus for some time?
- Was he an accidental bystander to the events taking place in the Garden of Gethsemane, his curiosity piqued by the hub-bub and noise?
- Why would he have been wearing only a linen cloth?
- Why did the soldiers try to arrest him?
- “...ran away naked”: Has nudity been a part of our mental image of the arrest of Jesus?
- Why would the author of the Gospel of Mark include this detail?

Even more questions could be brought to this text, with no right or wrong answers to any of them. The incident doesn’t add anything to the plot or help move the narrative forward. But what an interesting image to reflect on. I could be cheeky and ask, “As a minister, priest and pastor, I invite you to reflect on the spiritual significance of the presence of a fleeing naked man at a key point in the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection.” This might be a bit much though! However, because the scene is such a surprising one, I invite you to use it as a lens through which to approach the rest of the story.

How? If we've never thought about these two obscure, overlooked verses and they surprise us, they might jolt us into using fresh eyes to think about the rest of the story, a story that we may know so well (because we've heard it so many times) that we've become inured to the true, shocking power of Jesus' death and resurrection. As I've shared before: While the common adage might say, "The devil is in the details," so is God.

Just as this "fleeing naked man" incident can't help but invite all sorts of questions, perhaps this "raising of questions" is itself the spiritual significance of the story. It is important for us to bring questions to scripture because questions draw us deeper into our sacred story. Challenge scriptures. Let them challenge you. After all, we have good precedent in the story of the Passion. Both Pilate and Herod have questions for Jesus; and on some occasions, Jesus answers their questions by responding with his own questions. Questioning is a holy task because questions help us to see the story fresh and anew, helping us "to read the Bible as if [we've] never seen it." It is a Resurrection task, a Resurrection gift, a Resurrection way of life.

This Holy Week and Easter, may we hear the story as if we've never heard it before, open to being surprised by the surprises, and the greatest gift of all: the risen Jesus who continues to live among us. To gloss C.S. Lewis, may we be surprised by joy!

Have a blessed Holy Week and Easter, and a meaningful Great 50 Days.

Blessings,

The Rev. Bruce Chalmers  
St. Mary's, Sorrento

### **Come Join Us**

April 9	10 a.m.	Palm Sunday
April 13	7 p.m.	Maundy Thursday Service
April 14	10 a.m.	Good Friday Service
April 16	10 a.m.	Easter Sunday Service
April 16 – June 4	The Great 50 Days of Easter	
June 4	10 a.m.	Pentecost Sunday

