

*Christ Is Risen All Around Us*

A little boy was drawing a picture. His mother asked him, “What are you drawing?” and he answered “A picture of God.” “But, Honey,” she said, “No one knows what God looks like.” And the boy said “Now they will.” We chuckle because our God is immortal and invisible; it is impossible, of course, for us to depict Him in any way that would do Him justice. The First Commandment tells us to not make a graven image for God. Any representation we would make of God that we would call authoritative would limit Him in some way and lead us astray, like the Aaron’s Golden calf.

Yet, being human, we all have some sort of image of God in our minds. Traditionally, God is often imagined as an old man with a beard up in the sky, watching us through a telescope. God is nothing like that, and I don’t think anyone really thinks that God is even remotely resembles that, but that’s the image handed down to us. Some people who have a skeptical outlook on religion may have resisted coming to worship on this Easter Sunday because, they said, they don’t buy into the myth about the “old man up in the sky.” If that is you, relax and be at ease, because, even though we most certainly believe in God, we don’t buy into that “old man in the sky” myth either.

It’s interesting to note that there is one Greek word, that occurs several times in the Bible, that gets translated as *heaven*, that can mean at least three different things, one of them being sky. This word refers to what we would call today the *atmosphere* immediately around us. It also refers to the place where we find the stars and planets, sometimes called in English the *sky* or the *heavens*. And it also refers to the abode of God, the place where God dwells, also called *Heaven*. Could it be that when we talk about God, “Our Father who art in heaven,” we are not referring to a God way up there somewhere beyond our reach, but to our God who is accessible and all around us like the air we breath? We most certainly are.

While we cannot make an image for God, God Himself reveals Himself to us in our world in the person of Jesus Christ, who is both God and man. We can make an image, like a drawing or painting, of Jesus because of his humanity. Jesus himself is the perfect image of God, truly God in human flesh. We can only really know God through Jesus. Of all the important facts that we could relate about Jesus, such as his Virgin Birth, his miracles, and his teachings and so forth, the most amazing, the most wonderful fact is that he died and that Christ is risen. [**He is risen indeed.**]

Christ, being risen, is Lord of all. Death is behind him. Death is what puts a stop to all our plans. Death is what ruins everything eventually. Death is our enemy. But because Jesus conquered death, all things are now possible. Nothing can stop Jesus from accomplishing whatever he wants to accomplish. Our triumphant Lord is invincible because Christ is risen. [**He is risen indeed.**] So Christ, not subject to death, and not limited by any physical constraints, is all around us, and he promises to meet us at certain times and places.

Jesus says, “Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.” So we know that Jesus is here now as we gather together in his name to hear his Word and sing his praises. Jesus also said that the bread of the Holy Communion is truly his body and the wine is truly his blood. So we know that Jesus is also sacramentally present here today in the Lord’s Supper. Christ’s presence in the sacrament of the altar does many wonderful things for us: It strengthens us for service; it gives us a foretaste of Christ’s coming kingdom; it unites us in one body. Perhaps most importantly, the sacrament forgives us our sins. When we receive the sacrament in faith, our sins are forgiven.

Sin is always a Christian concern. Especially throughout the season of Lent, we have thinking about the importance of God's law and we know how far we have fallen far short of following it perfectly. The good news that Christ is risen [**He is risen indeed.**] tells us that our salvation has been won. Christ has freed us from sin, death, and the devil. The penalty for our sins has been paid in full. The bottom line of our Christian faith is that our sins are forgiven. Hallelujah! Amazingly, this all comes to us as a free gift. We don't have to earn or buy our salvation. We don't have to go on any kind of great spiritual quest, or make any long pilgrimage, or make any kind of huge personal sacrifice. There is no test to pass, no hazing to endure, no oath to memorize. We just open our hands and receive God's undying love for us.

Scripture has many stories about people who received God's grace from Jesus just that way. On one occasion, Jesus healed ten lepers who called out to him. They had nothing to offer him, no silver and no gold, and they hadn't performed any good works. They knew Jesus by reputation only and they hoped against hope that he would be kindly disposed them – and he was. Jesus made them clean. On another occasion, a paralytic was let down through the roof on a litter by his friends so that Jesus could heal him. Jesus forgave the man's sins and the man walked home. Jesus told a story about a “down and out” prodigal son who wanted to go back home to be a servant, if his father would have back in that capacity. But before he could get all the way home, his father came running out to meet him. Before he could repeat his confession, the father had restored him to son-ship. That such things are not just the stuff of parables, but that they really happen, is miraculous.

Through the season of Lent, we had Bible studies on Tuesday mornings and sermons on Wednesday nights about the miracles associated with Jesus' death, such as the darkness that covered the earth, the earthquake, and the tearing of the temple curtain. Those miracles drew attention to the cross of Christ and confirmed that Jesus' atoning sacrifice

had been accepted. These miracles heralded that now God and humanity were at one. Jesus' resurrection that first Easter was also a great miracle. Our God who created humanity in his own image, restored Jesus to life as the firstborn of the dead, a man raised to die no more. And the real miracle in that is that God did this for us, so that our sin might be pardoned. He did it so that we might be at one with Him. By the cross and resurrection God bridged the gap of sin separating Him from us.

That is what Easter is all about: Amazing grace; unconditional love, unmerited forgiveness. That is what the church is all about. It's not about making money; it's not about playing politics; it's not some quaint, meaningless cultural ritual. The church is here, Christ is here, for your spiritual well-being and salvation. If you are worn down by the cares and troubles of life, Jesus is here for you today, promising you hope for a better future, because his load is light. If you are troubled and terrified by your past sins, knowing that that you let down God and your fellow human beings, Christ is here, clearing the slate of what's gone on before. When death threatens you and your life is almost over, Christ will be there for you too, to comfort and cheer you, with promises of eternal life and blessedness beyond our wildest dreams, beyond all the heavens, where we will see Him as He is, face-to-face.

All this is true because Christ is risen. [**He is risen indeed.**] And may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.