

Easter Sunday - Year B

April 4, 2021 - ECY

Isaiah 25:6-9 | Acts 10:34-43 | John 20:1-18

Alleluia, Christ is Risen! The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia.

And here we are, at 5pm on a Sunday night. I am deeply impressed by anyone who attends a Sunday 5pm service, on a week that is densely packed with church services. Perhaps you just can't get enough of the resurrection! Or perhaps you are one of those people who will go to just about any church service you can, even on Zoom. Or perhaps you have found this place, ECY, to be your spiritual home, and so there is nowhere else you would rather be at 5pm on a Sunday night, even on this day that we usually associate with Easter morning or the evening just before it, the Easter Vigil.

But here we are - gathered once again on Zoom to proclaim Christ's resurrection, and to reflect on what it means for us today and every day of our lives.

As I anticipated Easter this week, I've been thinking a lot about clothing. Of course there is the novelty of how we can wear just about anything to church when tuning in on Zoom - sweatpants, pajamas. But now, one year into this particular format of worshipping together, I fear that the novelty has worn off. This week, I began to reflect on people who have taken an opposite approach to Zoom, as stories about La Verne Ford Wimberly began popping up on my Facebook feed. Ms. Wimberly is a church member in Tulsa, Oklahoma who decided, when her church began meeting online roughly a year ago, to continue dressing in her Sunday best. Every Sunday, Ms. Wimberly would dress in an exquisitely color-coordinated outfit, from shoes to jacket to an excellent assortment of hats with ribbons and netting, showcasing a vibrancy of

color and the vibrancy of the Black Church tradition. Every week Ms. Wimberly took a selfie photo of herself dressed in her Sunday best, and every week she posted it on Facebook, as a proclamation of faith and an encouragement to others.

This story made me think twice about what I would choose to wear for Easter this Sunday. But even before learning about La Verne Wimberly, I was already thinking about clothing when I read our gospel text for today. For some reason, act of the spirit or coincidence, I was drawn to the articles of clothing in this resurrection story, in a way I had never been before. More specifically I was drawn to these lines. When Simon Peter entered the tomb he “saw the linen wrappings there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.”

As I tried to imagine this scene, I couldn’t decide whether Jesus had left the tomb in haste, or with great care. Did Jesus shake off his linens, the ones he was buried in, and ball up the cloth on his face and throw it away, which is why it’s off to the side in a place by itself? Or did Jesus proceed with slowless and intention, easing out of the clothing that must have smelled like death, and carefully wrapping up the cloth on his face before setting it to the side?

In either case, Jesus left his clothing behind. From here on out we don’t get a good description of what Jesus is wearing. Most of the gospels do describe what the angels are wearing - they are dressed in white, and in some accounts a blinding white. But we don’t know that Jesus is dressed in white, or even that Jesus is dressed in flowing robes - like those that we see depicted in Sunday school sketchbooks. We do know that Jesus is mistaken for a gardener at first by Mary, when she is weeping by the tomb. But the account doesn’t set up the scene for us in great detail. We don’t know the exact layout of the garden. We don’t know the costume

details. We have to fill in the gaps. All we get is the emotion of the scene; the impression of Jesus who has left his clothing behind and simply appears to Mary right where she is, in the midst of the garden, in a way that is so natural and unassuming that she at first thinks nothing of it.

The risen Jesus is not bound by time or context. The risen Jesus doesn't necessarily wear robes that were worn in the Levant in the first century. Instead, the risen Jesus appears to us each, wherever we are. The risen Jesus takes on our humanity throughout history - takes on our clothing and context throughout history - so that we might understand how incredible the incarnation of Jesus Christ truly is. The incarnation does not simply last for the 33 years during which, tradition says, Jesus walked on the face of the earth. The incarnation extends beyond those 33 years - because of the resurrection. God is still with us. And we experience the resurrection whenever we, like Jesus, take off the clothing of death and cast it aside and put on the clothing of salvation - clothing in which we feel as though we can be ourselves completely.

Is this clothing thing a metaphor? Yes, it is a metaphor. And yet I think it has a literal component too. When La Verne Wimberly wears the bright hats and outfits that make up her Sunday best, that is a sign of the resurrection. When trans people wear the clothing that fits the gender they know themselves to be, that is a sign of the resurrection. And when Lil Nas X creates a music video in which he can dress up and inhabit a world called Montero where we don't hide the parts of ourselves that we don't want the world to see, yes that too is a sign of the resurrection.

Resurrection looks like a lot of different things, in a lot of different places, at a lot of different times - which is not to say that the gospel is simply a tool to bend our will and our

context. By no means! As the Apostle Paul would say. Jesus is the constant through all of this. Jesus is our standard. And Jesus is our salvation. On this Easter Day, and at all times, we have the gift and the responsibility to ask what Jesus would do in our own times. How Jesus would be in our own times. On this day, Easter Sunday, we unwrap ourselves from the garments of sin and death, the garments of selfish pride and illusion. And instead, we put on the clothing of salvation. We clothe ourselves in Jesus Christ, who showed us how to live not for ourselves alone, but for something greater than ourselves.

When we set out on a journey, packing the right clothing is just the beginning. There are still obstacles ahead, many of which we can't even see yet. Clothing ourselves in Jesus Christ doesn't mean we are impervious to hurt or harm. Clothing ourselves in Jesus Christ doesn't mean we have all the answers. In fact, it can be all too easy to let that clothing harden into a shell of righteousness that separates us from the world - and that is *not* what Jesus intends. And yet, clothing ourselves in Christ is the first step on the journey of resurrection. Because resurrection truly is a journey, not a moment. Resurrection is a way of life that we strive to live into every day.

As you prepare to embark on this season of resurrection, imagine what clothing you need to shed - and yes, this is a metaphor here! Imagine what presuppositions you need to shed, to prepare the way for salvation. And then imagine what clothing you need to take on. What does clothing yourself in Jesus Christ, or clothing yourself in salvation, look like today? These are the questions that I invite you to reflect on, in our breakout rooms in just a moment. Or, simply reflect on what dressing up for Easter Sunday means in your personal and family

traditions. Did you think about what you would wear today, even as you sit in front of a camera on Zoom? How does our clothing help connect us to the spirit of Easter?

And as we consider these outward trappings, we remember that salvation isn't something we can touch or weave, or sew of our own accord. It comes from Jesus Christ, who took on our flesh and became human, who carried our burdens and showed us the way of salvation. May we clothe ourselves in Jesus Christ on this day - because the resurrection looks so good on the lilies of the field, and it looks good on us too. In the name of God who creates, redeems, and sustains us. *Amen.*