

We continue with the Easter story; so these six Sundays after Easter are called “Eastertide” by most churches. We read the stories about Jesus’ resurrection appearances, and also about the growing courage and faith of the early disciples.

Today we have the famous story of Thomas, often called “doubting Thomas.” But it is good to remember that most of the disciples had doubts about Jesus being still alive. Mary Magdalene saw an empty tomb, but she did not believe, until the Risen Christ appeared and spoke to her directly, calling her by name. Then when she told the disciples that she “had seen the Lord,” they dismissed her words because they had not seen for themselves. Then on Easter evening, Jesus appears to them in a locked room and shows them his hands and his side. Only then did they rejoice. Thomas was not there at that time, and he said, “unless I see and touch the nail holes and the wound in his side, I will not believe.” A week later Jesus appeared again and allowed Thomas to touch him.

So... If we have doubts about Jesus rising, or appearing in bodily form, we are in good company. It is totally natural. As I suggested on Easter Sunday, perhaps even more important than the physical resurrection of Jesus, (since those appearances lasted only a short time), is his *spiritual* resurrection, the Spirit of Christ still living among us on earth. Remember that he told Mary Magdalene not to cling to him, since he must ascend. Remember that while breaking bread with two disciples, he vanished from their sight. He was still at the table *in spirit*. And In his own words, he told disciples that he must leave them, but that His Spirit would remind them of the words he had spoken to them.

So we trust that the Risen Lord, as *Spirit*, can still be with all of us, and we also call this presence The Holy Spirit. We trust the disciple's testimonies of "seeing the Lord," even as we open our minds and hearts to his presence, that make our own testimonies. We are always looking for examples or illustrations of Divine Spirit being in our midst. One way is that we always look to *Beauty*, and especially beauty in nature: beautiful sunrises and sunsets, the beautiful diversity of birds and flowers that now adorn our yards.

At Easter and Eastertide, we look specifically for examples of things that show movement from death to life, things that are transformed, examples of a Spirit that changes lives. To say that the Spirit of Christ is alive is to say that there is a Spirit active in this world that does indeed move "through the valley of the shadow of death." (Some theologian once said that a Gospel message cannot be good news for the world unless it can be spoken even in places like concentration camps of the Holocaust.) That sounds extreme, but it does make the point that the good news of Jesus Christ must involve not only grace and power, but also his deep love that transforms suffering, and is victorious even over death.

I did happen to come across an example of great love and lasting spirit in the face of death. Apparently in the Boston Holocaust Museum, there is a sculpture that has the following inscription from a survivor: *ILSE, a childhood friend of mine, found a raspberry in the camp and carried it in her pocket all day and presented it to me that night on a leaf. Imagine a world in which your entire possession is one raspberry and you give it to your friend!* In the midst of the valley of the shadow of death, kindness and love can thrive and live on.

This is the Spirit that Jesus exemplified and promised to share with all who follow him: A steadfast spirit of love, hope, and joy even in life's darkest moments. Peter was connecting love and joy with the reality of suffering (those early Christians were indeed suffering persecution, even execution). Paul, similarly emphasized the need to give thanks and rejoice in all circumstances, and we know that he wrote such words when he was *in prison* (Philippians chapter 4 and 1:7,14). The psalms remind us that "weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning." In our reading this morning, Peter insists that in the spirit of Christ we have a hope that is imperishable and unfading... that there is always a reason for hope, and thus always a reason for thanksgiving and rejoicing.

So we sing, we join the Psalm writers, and "make a joyful noise, and sing to the Lord with gladness!" We sing partly due to the memories we have that Divine Love is Steadfast in this life (a favorite hymn: "Great is they faithfulness!"). And we sing in anticipation of the future... that the goodness and love we have known is ever present ("morning by morning new mercies I see!"). The very act of singing, (and we could add dancing!) makes the message more a reality in our lives. It helps create what the words express.

So, yes... I have a song that sings about this season of Springtime... full of new life, in flowers, birds, and sunnier days. But I decided to add a verse about Jesus to make the connection with his resurrecting power ... Yes, there is new life all around in nature, but we do need more than just the visible/physical example of Springtime; we need the inner, spiritual resurrection in our minds and hearts, the kind of new life

shown and taught by Jesus... New life through amazing grace, and an emphasis on love and forgiveness.

So here's my song that rejoices in nature, but also adds conviction that new life comes in the Spirit of Christ, that is still alive and transforms our minds and hearts.

Spring is here again, I can feel it in the air. Spring is here again, there's new life everywhere! Flowers start to bloom and the birds begin to sing, It's Springtime, come back again!

1. *Oh the things that we can do, now the sun is shining through. Time for us to say, new life, we're on the way!*
(Chorus)
2. *Oh the places we can go, and explore, what ya waiting for? Time to get outdoors, and start something new!* **(Chorus)**
3. *Fill our hearts with Joy and Praise, for Christ the Way. He is peace and love, and hope for every day!* **(Chorus)**