

John 20:1-18  
31 March, 2002

Easter

### “Another Reality”

In what realities do you live? And yes I meant to say realities, plural. For example, when a student is graduating from college or university, we might say something like, “Now it’s time to enter the real world.” I don’t think that’s quite right. The world of the university is a real world, too. It’s a very different kind of world from the one outside of the university, but it’s still quite real.

So in how many realities do you live? If you’re employed you probably live in two quite different realities, the realities of work and of home. Possibly you act and speak differently in each of those real worlds you inhabit. The trick, of course, is to have enough integrity in yourself so that while you act and speak differently in those worlds, as appropriate, you are still the same person.

I did not watch the HBO series *The Sopranos*. But from what I understand, the lead character, Tony Soprano, was not a man of integrity. In one world he was a mob boss, ruthless, vindictive, and in full command. Which if you’re a mob boss is probably the only way to be. But at home he was quite different. At home he tried to deal with all the personal issues that bedeviled him and could be confused and insecure. In what realities do you live? And how do they shape you?

So, here’s why I’m asking that question on this Easter Sunday. The other day as I headed off to Theology on Tap I said to Char, “I guess I’m preaching a re-tread this Sunday. I got nothing. I hate preaching on Easter. How can you possibly rise to this occasion.” And by the time I got to the car it dawned on me. The reason I, a pretty good occasional preacher, if I do say so myself, have such trouble on Easter is that Easter reveals a reality that is so radically different from the world we live in day in and day out, that it’s hard to even imagine.

It was hard for those who directly experienced the first Easter. Peter and the other disciples see that the tomb is empty. John says that they believed, though what they believed is hard to know because John adds they did not understand. Mary Magdalene looks in and sees two angels. Ordinarily you would think that would be an amazing, remarkable event. But immediately she turns and speaks to the person she thinks might be the gardener. The new reality they have experienced is too much for them to take in.

Easter calls us to do something very difficult. Easter calls us to get past all the realities of this world which we know so well, which envelop us, and which sometimes overwhelm us. Easter calls us to get past the realities we may be immovably stuck in, and get into a new reality, a new way of being, a new way of believing, a new way of seeing the world, and a new way of living in the world.

Easter does not take us out of this world, out of the realities we know. What Easter does is reveals to us something completely different, unexpected, hard to grasp because it is so unlike almost everything else we know. Easter reveals to us God’s power over sin and death. Easter

reveals to us God's power over the powers of this world oppress us. Easter reveals to us the depth of God's love and commitment to us. Easter reveals the lengths to which God will go to win us over and to free us from our limited vision.

Easter calls us to live a full life here on this earth, secure in the knowledge that the reality of this world is not all there is because there will be a new heaven and a new earth, because Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us, because Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection of the dead.

And Easter calls us to live out God's reality with integrity. Easter calls us to be resurrection people in a world scared by and immersed in death. Easter calls us to be forgiving people in a world of revenge and getting even. Easter calls us to be believing people in a culture of doubt. And in a world of oppression where people take what they can from whom they can, Easter calls us to be people of justice.

Yes, Easter asks a lot. But it gives way, way more than it asks. Live in the reality of God's love and God's life. Christ is risen! Yes! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!