



First Christian Church of Orange (Disciples of Christ)

1130 E. Walnut Ave. • Orange, CA 92867 | 714.538.9681
orange1st@fccorange.com | www.fccorange.com

April 16, 2017 | Easter Sunday

SCRIPTURE: John 20:1-18 (NRSV)

By Pastor Dayna Kinkade

The Resurrection of Jesus

20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹² and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ¹⁷ "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

<I plan to enter the sanctuary dressed as an angel – announcing the good news of the resurrection — all the way down the aisle and to the pulpit.>

Hear the good news! Christ is risen! Wake up! Christ is risen! The tomb is empty!



I am the Easter Angel and I am here to announce good news! Jesus Christ is alive! I have seen the Lord!

I know you are not used to seeing me in my angel outfit. Most of the time I leave my wings at home. But today is Easter and if there ever was a day to dress the part, today is the day.

I tried out my wings for the first time back in 1997...but the story begins even further back to the first summer I attended Riverside Lutheran Bible Camp with my cousin, Ruth. I was hooked. I was a country kid with working parents so a week of playing, singing, learning, and living in community at Riverside was the high point of summer. It also gave me a different perspective on God and Christianity. I couldn't wait to get back to camp the next summer, the summer after sixth grade. Roxie Seeger was my counselor and her smile and warmth made me feel like our cabin had the best counselor of all.

We concluded each night of camp on campfire hill, eighty plus kids gathered around a roaring fire, singing any number of serious and silly songs, listening to counselors tell stories. But on this one night, campfire was interrupted by men carrying torches, storming campfire hill. The men were shirtless and unfamiliar to me, and they sternly yelled at us to follow them. Roxie looked stunned and confused as she gathered us to follow these men down the hill and into the woods.

We followed them into a part of the camp that was unfamiliar to me. As we came around a bend in the road I saw another big campfire and three crosses. Three men hung on the crosses, the one in the middle had a crown of thorns and appeared to be in agony. As soon as the crosses came into view all chatter ceased. You could hear sobbing. Some campers were afraid. We listened as the one in the middle spoke and then hung his head as if he died. We listened more as we were told that Jesus suffered and died to pay the price of our sin.

We silently returned to our cabins and got ready for bed and devotions. Many of us were in tears. We all prayed with Roxie to accept Jesus into our hearts after seeing with our own eyes what he did for us.

<take off halo> Taking off my halo for a moment I want to say that what happened to me was wrong – it was emotional abuse and should have never happened the way it did. It was difficult to discern reality from fiction and it came completely out of the blue. The counselors didn't even know it was going to happen. It was something the maintenance guys and a few of their friends dreamed up and I just happened to be a camper at camp the first time they enacted it. I learned that several years later when I started working there.

The crucifixion skit was shocking and definitely made an impression, unfortunately it made the wrong impression. It placed all the emphasis of the Christian message on the cross. But the cross isn't the message of our faith – the cross is not the good news. The good news is that in spite of the crosses of this world – Jesus lives – God lives – love lives.

At some point, someone must have said something. The crucifixion skit continued to me done week after week, year after year, but by the time I started working at camp a few years later, an Easter angel was added to the drama.

And guess who got to be the Easter angel one week? <put on halo> That's right, me! The morning after the big crucifixion drama, the Easter angel ran from cabin to cabin at the crack of dawn, making a ruckus, waking people up, announcing the good news that Christ is risen! It was great fun to be the Easter angel, but for some reason, there was very little Easter joy among campers. The Easter angel never did have the kind of impact as those men hanging on crosses. But, we were told as staff, you can't have one without the other.

I didn't really get it then. I didn't get how the resurrection really mattered. If Jesus did all he needed to do on the cross, why did he need to be resurrected? As the Easter angel, I didn't have to understand it, my job was to be as obnoxious as I possibly could and I was very good at that.

Fast forward forty years and twenty-seven Easter sermons. Guess what? I am still an Easter angel. I realize that "angel" may be a bit of a stretch – and I don't always wear the wings – but I am commissioned to tell anyone who will listen that the tomb is empty and Christ is alive! I have seen the Lord!

Now I don't want you to think that being an Easter angel is all fun and games, because it's not. Easter angels spend much of their time in awful places like tombs, where sadness and sorrow and suffering weigh as heavy as stone. We are directed to go to those places where people are prone to despair and ready to give up. We visit those whose hearts are broken and hopes are dashed. We visit those who tremble with fear. We also spend quite a bit time saying, "Be not afraid." In these dark places, we share the good news that God is alive and present – that love wins! It sometimes takes a while for that news to settle in so sometimes I just have to wrap people up in my wings and sit with them. That's what Easter angels do.

Quite often, Easter angels are misunderstood. I don't carry a magic wand. I can't zap pain or end suffering with the wave of a wand. I'm also not trying to sprinkle happy dust over the serious concerns of our world. Because all I have is love and tenacity – some people think I am useless and they swat me away.

The other thing that people do, even with the wings, is confuse me with a historian. They think that all I do is bop in once a year to announce something that happened a long time ago and then try to convince you that you should care. <looking around> News alert! We are not celebrating a historical anniversary here – we are celebrating something that continues to shape and inform the way we live today and every day! The truth is that the Bible gives five different versions of Jesus' resurrection and no one knows for certain what happened. There are no eye witness accounts, only stories handed down. So, when I talk about the resurrection I am NOT talking about history – I am talking about God's story – and our story.

What know for certain – and what I want you to know for certain – is that Jesus came to life in those who continued his message and ministry. The Romans and corrupted religious leaders tried to shut him up – but couldn't. He lives on. The good news he announced for the poor continues! Providing for the least of

these continues! Loving our neighbors – even our enemies – continues. Working for justice, serving others, facing persecution continues. Jesus continues!

And so does crucifixion, and lynching, and torture, and capital punishment, and chemical weapons, and campaigns of terror by disgruntled husbands, tyrant dictators, and radicalized religious fundamentalists that use violence to accomplish their ends. We cannot stick our heads in the sand and ignore what is going on. We have to stand up to it and believe that the crosses of this world cannot defeat love. They can kill us but they cannot kill God. Jesus dying on a cross exposed sin – the cross is the sin – the cross is the injustice. But Easter says the cross does not, cannot, and will not get the last word. The death dealers of this world do not get the last word. Christ is alive.

When you read the news – it may seem like Good Friday. When you are broken and on the verge of despair it might feel as if you are in a sealed tomb. But that is not how our story ends. That is not how God's story ends. The Easter angels come out – saying, "Don't be afraid!"

The message of Easter is "not simply don't be afraid to die – but don't be afraid to live!"¹

The first time I put on those wings I didn't get it. I certainly never dreamed that I'd still be an Easter angel all these years later. I still get to annoy people with the message that the cross does not get the last word. I still get to provoke people to trust and follow Jesus. I still get to challenge people to become Christ-like in service and love. I still get to wake people up and be obnoxious with resurrection hope. I still get to sit with people in the darkest moments and let them know it's going to be okay. I get to do all that because I am an Easter angel.

And guess what – so are you. It's time to put on our wings and live as though this day matters.

Amen.

¹ This is from the Living the Questions curriculum on Practicing Resurrection – a part of a quote by DeWayne Zimmerman.