

Dear friends in Christ



“Resurrection is Living Water”

Rev. Dr. John C. Forney
April 4, 2021, Easter Day

Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24;
Acts 10:34-43; Mark 16:1-8

When we last gathered, the sun had been obscured in deep darkness. Subterranean tremors shook the land. All that was stuck became unstuck. And the ghastliest spirits were let loose to roam the land. The veil separating holy and profane was rent in two. It was a day of terror and dereliction.

Lent concludes with the most bitter journey. Yet, in community, we were provisioned to take the final steps. And to receive, as did Mary, his mutilated body from the cross. As Christ is crucified in a thousand venues, in a thousand times. Pray we be prepared to receive his crucified body --- the starved, the homeless, the disrespected, the isolated, the tortured. And let us remember that this is not the end of the story.

Crucifixion is every day. Likewise, Resurrection.

In the simple act of receiving Christ's mutilated body is the seed of Life Abundant – Resurrection – Living Water. For Matthew 25 people, Easter is every day (look it up).

How this transformation takes place...who can say? In deepest darkness are

mysteries beyond comprehending. Yet, the deathly cold tomb is empty. And we hear our name called out, “Diane, Jim, Barbara, Pam, Faith...” Whom do you seek? Life renewed floods back into the void. Like those women overflowing with both terror and astonished hope. We announce to the world, “We have seen him.”

In Resurrection Faith, the Church kneels down to receive Christ’s broken body – yes, the homeless, the addicted, the destitute. And life springs forth. HOPE and PROMISE breathe. He comes to us, taking up residence in mind and heart in many guises.

LIVING WATER --, he is among us. Easter refreshment quenches our thirst. Living Water, Bread, Good Shepherd, Teacher, the Way, the Vine, the Door – The gospel of John uses many images to portray the risen Christ in all fullness. But give me LIVING WATER.

Let me tell you about water.

I remember my first church out in the desert. It was not the most promising place. Only four members of the congregation remained. My charge was to wrap up a bequest to the church and close the doors. Forever.

This was not the most promising of assignments, not a great career move. Only a congregation of four! Everything was hot and dusty. On my first visit, there was not even a glass of water to be had. The water had been turned off months ago. What can be more depressing than the hot desert without any water. Not a drop.

As the few faithful, in the coming weeks, were joined by several others, the first decision made was to get the water turned back on. It took a couple of weeks, but when the spigot was opened up and water gushed forth, Living Water, we knew we stood at the possibility of Resurrection. The Church was living again.

From there numbers grew. Mission grew. A daily senior lunch program was begun at the regional community hall in the adjoining town of Johannesburg. A breakfast program was begun on Sunday mornings before church. We even ended up with a small youth program. Resurrection is Living Water. As you have given the “least of these” a cup of water, you have done so to me, Jesus tells us. Matthew 25.

That church was no longer a desiccated tomb. That church became a gusher of Living Water.

I was so saddened by the testimony this week of George Floyd's girlfriend on the stand. She spoke of their mutual addiction flowing from prescribed opioids. She testified to the pain and difficulty in overcoming addiction, which George never did. In her words, she touched many Americans touched by addiction – of a family member, a friend, a work colleague – or maybe they, themselves.

If ever we needed the refreshment of effective treatment, if ever these families needed help, it is now. Those working in the field of addiction: clinicians, doctors and nurses, administrators and funders – all are a fount of LIVING WATER. The Risen Christ personified. Right here in San Bernardino!

In John's gospel the story is told of Jesus encountering a foreign woman at the village well. Jesus asks her for some water, for a cold drink. She upbraids him for asking. It is unseeing for a man, especially a Jew, to speak to a foreign woman about anything. Much less make a request. Such are the dank tombs of convention which confine us in death.

Jesus tells her that if she knew who was asking, if she knew of the water he could draw up, she would be asking of him -- for he would produce a gusher of Living Water. Tombs, water – yes, I'm mixing the metaphors.

The Living Christ we welcome this morning can't be contained in just one story. This is about the power of a Great Love let loose in the world. Just like that gusher which flowed from a little desert congregation so long ago.

Water is HOPE. Water is LIFE brim-full with possibility. A faithful Church is Living Water, the risen Body of Christ. Water is life and HE and his followers are the true LIVING WATER.

That's why those who would suppress us in voter lines have outlawed water. No handing out of water on pain of criminal charges! No LIVING WATER to be dispensed here. Do not encourage the voters, especially the wrong kind of voter. No Living Water for this democracy. No, sir. Let it die in the dustbin of white supremacy.

Rest assured, there will be a joyous band of the Spirit-anointed, water bottles in hand, ready to be hauled off to jail. With joyful hearts, singing hymns and freedom songs. Trust me – this is what will happen all across Georgia, sweltering in heat of white supremacy.

LIVING WATER can be dangerous to your reputation if you hand it out to the wrong voters. But that's precisely what Resurrection People will be doing.

I told Jai, upon hearing this news, she'd better be getting bail bond money ready. For a whole lot of us. Hundreds and thousands arriving in Georgia with gallons and gallons of water. LIVING WATER flowing straight from God Almighty.

Living Water is the eternal gift - Resurrection. In our Lenten study book, there's the most marvelous story of a couple, Victoria and Frank, hiking the Appalachian Trail, all 2,190 miles of it. As a result of their professional careers as writer and photographer, they had become exhausted and spiritually depleted. So, for renewal, they hit the trail.

As they neared the end of their months-long journey, on a scorching day in Massachusetts, they became desperate to find some water to fill their canteens and quench their thirst. Their throats were parched.

They left the trail and headed off on a back road in their search. Coming upon a house they spied, by the garage, a hose bib. They, being raised to be polite, thought they should ask permission.

What they found in the guise of an elderly couple was Living Water. Here's what happened when they rang her doorbell:

"A woman answered, looking a little puzzled to find two sweaty, smelly backpackers on her doorstep. Her husband joined her at the door as we explained our parched predicament. They escorted us into their kitchen—where they plied us with cold lemonade from the refrigerator and, quite unbelievably, warm cookies. We found ourselves in a most luxurious oasis. Before we left, the lady and her husband topped off our canteens with fresh water and added ice cubes to keep the water

cold.”¹

“Thirteen years after we stumbled to their door, I phoned the woman that other hikers have come to know as the ‘Cookie Lady.” She and her husband never forgot the couple who came to their doorstep in need of water. She told me, ‘You enjoyed the cookies so much that I try to keep fresh cookies around for other hikers.’ This couple was changed by our encounter with them, and they never took the comforts of their home for granted. By the time I phoned years later to say thank you, we too had been transformed by their hospitality.”

Living Water this couple was. The Easter Christ present in their simple hospitality. Resurrection is Living Water. We are Living Water. No dried-out Christians here.

Resurrection eternally remains a mystery in hearts of all who are drawn to him. I give the Last Word to Albert Schweitzer, who concluded his monumental and exhaustive search for the historical Jesus with this final paragraph – set to music by Jim Strathdee:

“He comes to us as one unknown without a name,
Without a name, without a name as of old by the lakeside he came to those men who knew him not.

He speaks to us, he speaks to us the same word: Follow me, Follow me!
And sets us to the task which he has to fulfill for our time.

He commands and to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple,
He will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts and the sufferings.

They shall pass through in his fellowship,
As an ineffable mystery they shall learn in their own experience who He is.”²

We too, shall learn in the experience of our journey through the years who he is. For me, nothing dead and dusty. He will be revealed as an Easter font of refreshing, LIVING WATER. Especially in every voter-suppression state of this Union. Amen.

¹ Frank and Victoria Logue, “The Journey,” *Are We There Yet?* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Forward Movement Press, 2017), 143-144.

² Jim Strathdee, Albert Schweitzer, “He Comes to Us,” *There’s Still Time*, Desert Flower Music, 1977.