

John 20:1-18
 With joy unbounded
 Easter April 21, 2019
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The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the most daring statement of Christian faith. Unless you consider God coming in the flesh to be even more bold. Either way, Christmas and Easter, stand together as shining pillars of Christian faith. The resurrection declares that the past is not prelude to the future. Our past failures, sins and regrets, need not determine our lives forever. Each of us has the opportunity to consider a future made possible by the forgiveness of sins and the new life that Jesus declares possible for all. Peter, James and John are not the only ones given a second chance! It's true for each of us.

"So do not cling to me, Jesus says to Mary; instead, go, and bring others along on the journey toward the heart of God. Easter always forces us to ask where and how we might want to cling, where and how we might turn away from the task and the journey."
 (Rowan Williams)

It's a startling command: do not cling to me. There is within each of us a desire to cling to what we know and more often that means the past. Yet Jesus does not allow such clinging. Without clinging we walk into a future that is alive with possibilities never before considered. Without clinging, we depend not upon ourselves but upon the justification that can only come from the God of Israel who sees beyond our past, beyond our fears and our failures, beyond our relentless desire to justify ourselves. As Jesus goes on to his home-in-the-Father, he promises an open future not bound by the past. Christian faith does not look back to a great teacher or a more example, but forward to where Jesus leads, to that being-at-home with God, that he has made possible.

On this Easter, I imagine those migrant women and girls, men and boys who have traveled across rugged countryside, fleeing desperate poverty and deprivation, clinging to nothing but the hope of a new life in a new country. Amassed at the border, the future utterly uncertain but still bright with hope and possibility - they embody the Easter promise of life from death. The past holds nothing for them, they have only a future fraught with danger nevertheless filled with hope. Thus, these poor migrants on the border of past and future, embody for all of us the journey that Jesus' summons us to in our journey toward God.

After the resurrection, the earliest Christians were sometimes called "followers of the way" (Acts 9) or the "friends of Jesus" (John 14) and their fledgling churches known as "resurrection communities." There was curiosity among their neighbors as they witnessed Jews, Gentiles, rich and poor caring for each other, sharing meals and helping those in need. In defiance of the local gods, these Friends of Jesus' sole allegiance was to the God of Israel who had raised Jesus from the dead. What held

them together was the conviction that Jesus was alive and his Spirit was leading them into a new way of life.

This is utterly true of our grieving companions on the way in Sri Lanka.

And this is what we celebrate each time we gather at the Lord's Table and baptize our children: the living presence of the Lord Jesus among us through his Spirit that binds his people together in love. We know Church history is stained with awful acts that have violated the dignity of men, women and children. We know the failures of the Church to bear witness to Jesus as Lord against all other competing gods. We know how timid the Church can be in the face of injustice, cruelty, oppression and racism. This has forever tarnished the witness of God's love in Jesus Christ. But that is not the whole story.