

CHRIST HAS RISEN! CHRIST HAS RISEN INDEED!

I want share a story from the Reverend Jim Kane. It goes like this: Rev. Kane suggests that "some people are scared to death of flying. To think of getting on airplane and taking off at 150 MPH, climb to an altitude of 30,000 feet and go 400 or so MPH, is a bit much.

Reminds me of the story told years ago about a flight of a four-engine jet plane. It was a lengthy flight and it got lengthier when the co-pilot came on the intercom and said, 'Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, we have lost power on our number two engine. So we will be an hour or so late. Sorry for the delay.'

A hour later the pilot came on the intercom, 'Well, folks, we have lost power in our number four engine. But nothing to worry about, we still have two engines that work. Sorry for the delay again but it we will be at least two hours late to our destination.'

A short time later, the now nervous co-pilot announced, "Ladies and gentlemen, I hate to inform you but we have lost number one engine. Now our plane is built to fly on just one engine. However, we are projecting a three-hour delay to our destination. We are very sorry for the inconvenience." With a nervous cabin now coming to life, one passenger exclaimed, "If we lose that last engine, we are going to be up here all day."

In today's Gospel reading, the followers of Jesus are cautioned to not be afraid. A man dressed in white says to Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Salome: "Do not be alarmed: I know you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified." But how could anyone not be filled with abject terror. They had witnessed Jesus being crucified and then buried in a tomb and then be told by a guy in a white robe that they should not be afraid!

It is not like Jesus had tried to tell those around him that something like this would occur. It is recorded in the Gospel of Mark that on three different occasions Jesus warned his disciples of his impending death and resurrection but it was too unbelievable to be real. His followers held on to the hope that Jesus would become a great leader who would stir the people up and overthrow the Roman tyrants. With Jesus' crucifixion, the dream was over. And then, on the third day, the tomb was empty and they were terrified.

We live in times of fear and uncertainty and there is so much that happens in our world that is beyond our understanding. So, we can understand how Jesus' followers must have felt. They must have felt as if all four engines had gone out and the crash imminent. Frederick Buechner reminds us that "anxiety and fear are what we know best in this fantastic century of ours. Wars and rumors of wars. From civilization itself to what seemed the most unalterable values of the past, everything is threatened or already in ruins. We have heard so much tragic news that when the news is good we cannot bear it."

But in the midst of all our fears and apprehensions, Jesus continues to say to all of us: "Do not be afraid." Earlier in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus calms the wind and the seas. He says: "Peace, be still". And he says to those in the boat: "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no

faith?" If history has taught us anything, it is to believe in the steadfast love of God and His power to rescue us from our worst fears and misfortunes.

Tonight, we have recalled the incredible and miraculous events in which God has saved his people, rescued them from imminent destruction and bring them to safety. In Exodus, God saves his people from annihilation and leads them to the promised land; and God still does. In Ezekial, God brings about a spiritual rebirth to those who are wasted and lost and hopeless; and God still does. In Isaiah, God offers us an abundant life that is not for purchase but freely given by the grace of God; and God still does. Jesus, in his ministry and his death and his resurrection offers us this hope and assurance.

The Reverend Jason Bonnicksen reminds us that "hope is faith in the immutable promise that miracles prevail when the darkness tries to win-out with cries of despair. Hope is a gift from God that helps us yearn, and live a life that believes and moves with the pledge of a better tomorrow. And what's more, hope springs-forth resurrection life, and draws us near to the love of Christ, who is the light of God who walked out from the grave to make the way for everlasting life."

In a few minutes, we will witness and participate in a new resurrection life. We will witness the first step of Levi's faith journey.

Levi, as you take these first steps on your new journey, you will not be alone. All of us gathered here in this Sanctuary will remember and renew our own Baptismal vows and be one with you as water is poured on you and then you are "marked as Christ's own forever." Levi, what is about to occur is not an attempt to merely sneak in a public washing of your scalp. This water will be permanent. Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that "baptism is more than a cleansing. It is death and resurrection. Paul himself, speaking in the Letter to the Galatians of the turning point in his life brought about by his encounter with the Risen Christ, describes it with the words: "I am dead." At that moment a new life truly begins. Becoming Christian is more than a cosmetic operation that would add something beautiful to a more or less complete existence. It is a new beginning, it is rebirth: death and resurrection."

Levi, as you start out in this "new beginning", be assured that that many will accompany you on your life path. Your parents and family and this congregation promise to support you in your life in Christ. Like all of us, there may come that day in you journey when you feel like you are running on one engine or all of them have flamed out and a crash is imminent. Levi, "Don't be afraid. God has your back. God will carry you and gently set you down, a gentle landing. Levi, you have been given "the courage and will to persevere" and "brought into the fullness of God's peace and glory."

Levi, as you begin your new life in the body of Christ, may you and all of us gathered here remember the words of Paul's Letter to the Church in Rome: [Rom. 6:3-5](#), "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection."

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AMEN