



SERMONS THAT WORK

Easter Day Year C

Outstretched Arms

[RCL]: Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 65:17-25; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or Luke 24:1-12

Alleluia, Christ is Risen! The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!

This morning, I want to say a word about Easter, a word taken from one of the great Eastern images of the mystery of the resurrection, an icon that has been a part of the Christian vision of what the Resurrection is all about since around the year 600.

I have been powerfully drawn to this icon lately, and I want to talk about it a bit this morning. Let's take a look. Remember: icons are about the theological meaning of people and events; they aren't representative art like we might typically encounter. Icons are never depictions of exactly what happened. They're pictures of what things *mean*. So, an icon of the Resurrection doesn't show what the resurrection might have looked like back then—an icon of the Resurrection shows what it *means* now.

[Display icon]

Look at it. Here, the risen Lord stands triumphant on the gates of hell while Satan, bound in chains, looks helplessly on. Some of the heroes of the Old Covenant—David, Solomon, Moses John the Baptist, folks like that—frame the scene, showing that all of God's dealing with humanity have led up to this moment, and are fulfilled by this moment. But Jesus doesn't just stand there and look smug; he doesn't bask in the glory of his victory. Instead, look, he's reaching out with wounded hands, grabbing Adam and Eve and raising them from their own death—which is symbolized by the coffins they are standing on—toward new life with him. He's pulling them up.

I want to offer you this image, this truly ancient interpretation of Resurrection, not just because it's beautiful, but because this is what Easter means today. This is Easter—right here and right now.

Easter is both about Jesus and about us. First of all, the Resurrection is about Jesus. As an historical event, it's both a powerful sign of who Jesus is, and it's also a vindication of Jesus' life, his teachings, and his death. Easter shows the life of Jesus to be the way of life for all creation, and it proclaims that nothing is

more powerful than that life. All of that is about Jesus. At the same time, Easter is about us. It's about what Jesus is doing right now, and right here, for each and every one of us.

Behold, this isn't really a picture of Adam and Eve—this is a picture of you and me. This is who we are and where we stand, exactly and precisely, this Easter morning. Christ is risen, and he has reached out with wounded hands, and grasped you by the hand, and he is even at this moment pulling you away from whatever coffins you are in, from whatever deaths you know and fight and fear. Jesus is, at this moment, drawing you toward himself, and toward new life with him. This is what's happening now. This is why we're here today.

There's more. We can see in this icon not only what Jesus has done and is doing, but also our own marching orders—a clear vision of how we should live in response to what Jesus is doing. All of that is in the figures of Adam and Eve, of you and me. I want to look at just two pieces of this rich scene.

The first thing Adam and Eve show is that our eyes need to be fixed on Jesus if we are going anywhere. If our attention is on ourselves, or if it's back on whatever our personal coffins happen to be, or if it's on the scenery around us, then more than likely we'll stay right where we are. If we look for life and direction and meaning anywhere but at the risen Lord—then our hearts will be divided, and our energy will be scattered, and our rising will be slow indeed. Somehow, the face of Jesus needs to fill our vision and capture our will—else we will be stuck. That's the first thing.

The second is that Jesus needs us to help. The Lord has grasped us—that is a gift. He is drawing us to him, and to his life—that is fact. There is nothing we have to do to make any of this happen. It's going on right now. But we can help. We can join our efforts to his effort. We can say “yes” to the hand that holds us and the arm that draws us forward. Remember, Jesus will live for us and he will die for us; he will call us, and he will grasp us; he will lead us away from the familiar and toward all sorts of new possibilities. He will make all manner of things possible and rich with joy. But he will not coerce us—he will not force us. Real love, mature love, never coerces, it never forces. It invites.

So, we can consent. We can cooperate. Like Adam and Eve in the icon, we can both focus our attention and direct our behavior toward accepting the offer being made, the hand being extended.

What we *do*, our behavior, can be in harmony with what Jesus is doing; our efforts can be joined with his.

This is not automatic. There are all sorts of ways and reasons to resist the resurrection grasp and the upward tug of the risen Lord. We may be complacent, we may be afraid, we may be content, we may be so self-absorbed, or so absorbed with things, or with some one thing, that we can see no farther than that. That may be happening to us; we may be resisting. We may well need to deal with one form of this or another.

And while that may be where we are, it isn't where Jesus is. Jesus is here. Jesus is—*this instant*—standing on

the broken gates of death and hell and wrapping his hands around you and beginning to lift you away from the old life of brokenness and into new life with him. That's where Jesus is right now. That's what Easter is about this very instant. That's what this day is about. That's what is most important. That's the vision that we are here to comprehend, and to celebrate, and to make our own.

The rest will follow. But this comes first. He is drawing us to himself.

Alleluia, Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!

Fr. Liggett was born in El Dorado, Kansas, and graduated from the University of Houston and the Episcopal Divinity School. He was ordained in 1977 and has served parishes in Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas. He is currently retired and living in Midland, Texas, where he most recently served as rector of Saint Nicholas' Church. He has been a contributor to Sermons That Work, in its various manifestations, for the last thirty years. For the last 25 years, Fr. Jim has taught philosophy courses at local community colleges, and he is presently an adjunct instructor in philosophy at Midland College. He is widowed with an adult son.

Published by the Office of Communication of The Episcopal Church, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

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