

Easter, Year A
Matthew 28: 1-10
March 23, 2008

Trinity Episcopal Church
Sonoma, California

The Easters in our Midst
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

I have always had a hard time with March. I think, March, not April, is the cruelest month. Maybe it's because I grew up in Minnesota where the gray descends in early November and stays until the middle of May. Maybe it's because March is the month when the snow begins to melt and then turns black with all the dirt and grime of winter. Maybe it's because by March, I used to wonder if spring would ever come. I remember asking my Dad, "Are you sure there's grass under the snow?"

Even though I've been away from Minnesota for almost thirty years and lived in California much of that time, I still have a hard time with March. I still find myself wondering—even with signs of spring all around me—if spring will ever come. I still find myself wondering if the green grass will be there—even when I'm standing on it.

I suspect the disciples felt similarly in the aftermath of the cross and the tomb. I suspect they doubted that joy would ever come again. I can imagine them all cooped up in that upper room—almost overcome with grief and fear. Getting on each others' nerves. Itching to get out and reluctant to leave. Then Mary of Magdela and the other Mary weary of it all. Restless, upset, at sixes and sevens, they get up and leave. They make their way to the tomb. Almost in a trance. Their hearts aching. Their souls numb.

Suddenly an earthquake. The ground shakes. The stone rolls from the tomb. They see a man sitting on the stone that had blocked the tomb. He's in dazzling white. Were they blinded by the light? Puzzled? Afraid? What do you suppose was their response? Did they shirk back or just stand very still?

Then the man—an angel of the Lord, says to them, "He is not here. He is risen."

I wonder how they took that news. Do you think they got it right away---or did it take some time to sink in? The way Matthew tells it, they got it right away. But I wonder. After all, they were still in shock, still living in a Holy Saturday kind of a world, still hovering between despair and hope.

I think many people live much of their lives in a Holy Saturday world—a world in which all appearances seem to point to the triumph of the tomb and the finality of the cross. An empty world. An unyielding world in which violence and sin and death seem to have the upper hand. A world where despair and loss and grief and fear seem to hold sway. A world littered with stones blocking the way to the empty tomb and the Risen Christ.

But suddenly there is an earthquake. The stone rolls away opening the door to a different kind of a world. An Easter world. A world in which God's mercies are indeed new every morning. A world that daily reveals the faithfulness of God. A world of

unbounded forgiveness. A world of limitless love. A world that says in so many ways death and the powers of darkness do not hold sway. An Easter world.

There is such an “is-ness” to Easter. It’s not a hope. It’s not a promise. It’s an event. A happening. A blow-out in the here and now. A moment when everything changes. Easter is now. This moment.

But there’s an on-goingness to Easter as well. Easter is always. Like an underground river watering the ground we walk on. Sometimes the earth cracks and we see the river running deep beneath our very feet. But it is always there. We can count on it. How does our prayer book put it—Christ is and was and is to come.

Sometimes it’s hard to see Easter in our midst. Stones block the way to the empty tomb and the Risen Christ. Sometimes it takes an earthquake or an angel to help us see Easter moments in our lives. And sometimes it takes looking with Easter eyes—eyes focused on new birth, on life-giving moments, on the working of the living God in the dailiness of life.

About this time of the year, when I was a kid growing up in Minnesota, I’d take “search for spring” walks. I’d put on my coat, pull on my boots, slip on my gloves and head out to the fields in search of the first signs of spring—water bubbling under thin ice, a green shoot, a robin. The funny thing about those walks was that once I saw one sign of spring, I saw lots of them. They seemed to be everywhere.

In the days and weeks ahead—in the great fifty days of Easter, open your eyes to signs of Easter among us. Watch for Easter moments—moments that surprise you, delight you, fill you with awe, moments when a deep peace washes over you.. See those Easter moments—moments that flash a light on the living Christ at work—in your lives, in the life of this community, in our country and in our world. When you catch a glimpse of Easter, fall down and give thanks for you have seen the living Christ.