

Easter 2014

Alleluia, He is Alive!

Rob Gieselmann,
St. Stephen's Church

Welcome to St. Stephens Episcopal Church. I am so glad you chose this **wonderful place**, and this **warm** St. Stephen's family, with which to share your Easter. (every time you hear Christ is Risen - noisemakers)

I want to tell you the story of Huguenot pastor Andre Trocme', and his village of Le Chambon, France, during the second World War. Trocme' was a man of conviction, and a pacifist - but he was not a pushover. "A curse on him who begins in gentleness;" he wrote. "He shall finish in insipi'dity and cowardice ..." "When the Nazis assumed control of France, Trocme' convinced Le Chambon to resist, and to welcome stray Jews.

In 1942, when the Vichy authorities turned to country villages to collect Jews on behalf of the Nazis, for delivery to concentration camps, Trocme' asked local students to send a letter warning the authorities that Le Chambon would not cooperate.

"We have learned of the frightening scenes which took place three weeks ago in Paris," these students wrote. [W]here the French police, on orders of the [Nazis] arrested ... all the Jewish families in Paris [tearing families apart, fathers from sons, mothers from daughters]. ... We feel obliged to tell you that there are among us [in Le Chambon] a certain number of Jews. But, we make no distinction between Jew[] and non-Jew[]. It is contrary to the Gospel teaching. We have Jews. You're not getting them.

Trocme' and the entire village hid Jews from the German and Vichy authorities by integrating them into their homes and lives, forging false papers, and ration cards. The Le Chambon Jews looked exactly like the Le Chambon Huguenots - And of course, the Huguenots would save Jews. They understood persecution; the Huguenots had been persecuted for generations. And as for Trocme' - he was not only a man of deep conviction, he was, claims Malcolm Gladwell, a dead man. He had nothing left to lose - and this is the rest of the story ...

You see, as a young boy Trocme' watched his mother die in a car accident, one that should have killed him. In his book, David and Goliath, Gladwell claims such events in one's life become seminal - for good or for bad - that the person who has lost the thing most precious to him - often becomes the person having the greatest courage.

Mary and the disciples lost everything on Good Friday. Yes, they lost Jesus - but - and I can tell you this from personal experience - when you lose someone close to you, you lose not only that person, but a part of yourself - The disciples lost a part of themselves. This man Jesus had enlivened them - invigorated them - peppered their lives with meaning. He had encouraged them to dream, but on Good Friday, the day he died, their dreams died.

Have you ever lost your future? These followers of Jesus lost their futures, so they fled. To an outsider, it appeared as though they fled Jesus' death; But, they didn't flee Jesus' death - they fled their own deaths. Which is why Jesus' resurrection on that first Easter morning - wasn't his alone - it was theirs. When light split both time and tomb in half, they came alive. Their lives had meant nothing, only hours before, and now their lives meant everything! *Alleluia! Christ is Risen. The Lord is Risen Indeed. Alleluia!*

*To the one - here this morning - who has lost everything - My Easter message is this: He is Alive! And so are you!...Because first and foremost, the Christian promise of life is a promise made to people who have died. You've suffered the pain of the cross, physically, or psychologically, through a loved one's death, or poverty or unemployment - you've purchased a sense of hopelessness, or abandonment - You need *something*, and I'm here to tell you, today you *have something*. Easter means life. The abyss of your death has become the porthole to your new life. *Alleluia! Christ is Risen. The Lord is Risen Indeed. Alleluia! He is Alive!* And so are you.

Don't you know, all the greats claim a person must die before she can live? Many people here have died, and now they live. Jesus said it himself, *a seed must fall to the ground and die*. The Apostle Paul wrote, *I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me*. Elsewhere, Scripture claims: *you have been buried with him in death, and now you have been raised with him in life*. So you see: to that person who needs **no** hope, has never needed hope, Easter morning is not much different from any other morning. But to the dead person, Easter is everything. It is the promise of physical life beyond the grave, but it is also the promise of real life, here, in this world. *Alleluia! Christ is Risen. The Lord is Risen Indeed. Alleluia!*

*** Isn't good parenting about letting go? Your number one job is to push your child out of the nest. Letting go means you let your child experience not just success, but failure. You know that disappointment and defeat teach just as much as - - or more than - success. The same is true for each of us - There is a way in which defeat and death lead to life - and in the spiritual

world, death is *still* the first step you will take towards God. The seed must fall to the ground and die.

Trocme' suffered one of life's greatest losses as a child, but his loss assembled meaning when he became responsible for saving hundreds of peoples' lives. Jesus' death was cruel, unjust, and seemingly meaningless - until he rose again, and infused you and the entire world with hope. So I actually hope that today you are here in need. Perhaps not dire - but need nonetheless. For in your need, you will experience the resurrection, the hope of the empty tomb. For it is at the grave - you see - that the Christian makes his song,

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