

Appearances get a lot of attention in our culture and world. It's a word that has many meanings.

Appearance could mean how you look. As a child, we took special care with our appearance Easter morning. In hope of getting out of the winter clothes, we might pulled out something 'springy' from last year, or maybe even have bought a new 'spring' dress – some flowery something – if you can imagine, for me – usually something with short sleeves, but - we were in Iowa. Spring doesn't usually come until *May* in Iowa and Easter is March or April. I'd wake up early Easter morning and check the window to see if it was raining, snowing or something in between and then beg to wear the dress anyway.

Over the last weeks here at First Trinity, we have had meetings and spent time trying to make sure the appearance of First Trinity is appropriate for this glorious day.

Appearance can also be used to talk of someone coming out, being seen. Appearance could mean the arrival and coming out of a public persona – a star or a politician, an author, an athlete. Children hope for the appearance, or at least evidence of, the Easter Bunny.

Pastors hope for the appearance of so many people that we run out of bulletins and have to bring chairs to put in the parlor. As people of faith, as people on a spiritual journey you seek signs, a coming out, if you will, of God in your life and to the world. And, today, you have come to celebrate the resurrection and appearance of the risen Christ. It's a unique story – there is nothing else like it in human experience. The resurrection is a unique event because God appeared in human history bringing a whole new dimension to life.

Frederick Buechner described it in this way:

Buechner recalled that Martin Luther once said, "If I were God, I'd kick the world to pieces." But, Buechner said, ML wasn't God, and God has never kicked the world to pieces. He keeps reentering the world, keeps offering himself to the world--by grace, keeps somehow blessing the world, making possible a kind of life which we all, in our deepest being, hunger for.

On the Sabbath, as the day was dawning, Mary and Mary went to the tomb. They may have felt that God had indeed kicked the world, theirs anyway. Their dawning could not have been easy or light. Their dawning, if they slept at all, must have been heavy with grief; a grief so strong that it took them to the tomb of the one they believed was to be the savior of the world. Were they looking for an appearance of God? No, they went to see the tomb; to be near the One so dear to them who had been so gruesomely killed. They weren't expecting anyone, except maybe guards and authorities.

All of a sudden God appears in an earthquake, shakes loose the stone that had been sealed by the guards and sends an angel from the heaven that moves the stone away and sits on it. For the guards, the appearance of an angel is bad news. To the women it is good news. With lightning and clothing as white as snow, the angel's appearance stuns the guards to silence and immobility.

To the women, the angel explains why there is no appearance of Jesus – dead or alive. His body is not here because he has been raised and he has gone ahead of you to Galilee – go, and tell the others.

They leave quickly – with fear and joy, running to tell the disciples when suddenly Jesus appears to them. Whether they recognize him from his greeting or by his appearance, we don't know, but they know it's him and they hold his feet in worship. A comforting, calming and joyful appearance of the risen Christ.

And Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me".

After the fear of Jesus' arrest and trial; after the long hours of Jesus' crucifixion; with Jesus' body in a tomb; after 2 long nights of grieving, confusion...the disciples are sent on a journey to see the risen Christ who has gone ahead of them.

Imagine what their Galilean journey might have been like. Of course they went by foot. Do you think they hurried as fast as they could go? Do you think they wondered if Jesus would suddenly appear around the next bend in the road, over the next hill? Did they run? Did they start out with fear and great joy as the women did?

Let's confess that 2000 years later, we do not run as quickly or as passionately as the women and then the disciples ran. We don't have the same level of intensity in our emotion. Perhaps because what was new and unique is now an old, familiar story for us. Maybe because we are satisfied, comfortable with life we have not set our course for Galilee.

But, go and tell...go to Galilee there you will see me. From our own Good Friday world where there is war, hunger, and destruction of nature, corruption, complicity and apathy. From our personal Good Fridays where it is dark and empty and angry words, depression, loneliness and despair echo through our tombs. From these places we are sent to Galilee.

We know the story of how God changed the world. We know the stone (in our hearts and minds) will be rolled away – by an earthquake – perhaps; or rather suddenly and mysteriously – perhaps; or little by little light begins to seep in, healing happens and new life appears. Death does not have the last word. Darkness cannot overcome the light of life in Jesus Christ. And we are told to journey to Galilee.

Jesus is going ahead of us, always ahead of us. There we will see him. Some, though certainly not all, of Jesus' appearances are recorded in scripture. There is great diversity in these appearances. To the women, he appeared while they were on their way to the disciples. To the disciples he appeared on the mountain where he had told them to go. To some, he appeared by the sea and cooked breakfast. Some he allowed to touch him. On the mountain, he blessed the believers and doubters alike and sent them to make disciples of all nations. To Paul he was a blinding light and a voice.

So, too, will our experiences of the risen Christ be different and various. The risen Christ appears in blinding light to some. To some

the risen Christ appears in the law and gospel, the forgiveness and grace found in scripture. To some the risen Christ appears in a life-changing event like baptism no matter what age. To some the risen Christ appears in healing or reconciliation that could only come from God. To some the risen Christ appears in vulnerability, openness and joy. Whole lives can be transformed when we set out on a journey to Galilee.

Do not be afraid...go to Galilee; there you will see him.

Christ is risen indeed, alleluia, alleluia!
Amen.