

When you come to church, what, I wonder, are you hoping to find?

For a long time, churches, especially Episcopal Churches, were primarily places of easy comfort and predictable familiarity. Most folks went to church because their parents did, and their grandparents did – multiple generations were often baptized, married, and buried all by the same parish church.

This isn't so much the case any more. And this, for me, is a reason to be very, very excited about the life of this church, in 2025 and beyond.

Making time to come to church isn't an easy habit that many of us here simply inherited from the generations who came before us. I've found this parish to be full of folks who've consciously chosen to be here, this community is a brilliant mix of the spiritually curious, of seekers, and some skeptics, all folks who are actively reaching for understanding of life and purpose, who take seriously their spirituality, and who want to develop and cultivate their relationship with God.

And that's what I hope to find at church – that it's a place where, together, we can actively wrestle with 'what it's all about.' The truth and reality of God. What do we believe? How do these beliefs impact and shape our lives, our interior lives, our shared life, and our lives out in the world? Questions not easily or quickly answered, questions that can never be answered once and for all time.

Today we proclaim that Christ is Risen! ... it's the climax of the Easter story, *the* Christian story. We've journeyed together, this week alone, from Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, to his last supper with his friends, to the agony of the crucifixion, the long, expectant waiting of Holy Saturday, and the Great Vigil,

and on to the thrill and the joy of the Resurrection proclamation. It's a well-known story, easily told, but the meaning of it all ... that's a lot harder to pin down.

As a child, I was taught, simply and tidily that Jesus died for our sins; Jesus paid a debt he didn't owe because we owed a debt we couldn't pay. You might have been taught something like that, too.

When the Christian story is all tidied up and reduced to a confident one-liner, pointing to just one definitive detail, a job-done, mission accomplished, the great Christian story becomes little more than an ancient artefact, carried into the present preserved and unchanged from the long-distant past. A precious and treasured artefact, perhaps, but still, something preserved, like a relic, a long-dead-thing to be looked at, displayed, especially at Easter.

When church is a place filled only with the familiar and the predictable: fixed, concrete facts of long ago, certitudes about what was accomplished back then, for once, for all, it becomes a kind of museum, a place to visit preserved, life-less things from the past.

When I come to church, I want to find myself at an epicenter of disrupting living tradition, living-tradition born of an ongoing and still life-giving story that's sustaining a vibrant, life-filled community, who together build and care for a house of worship for all people that's very much *alive*.

This church is a place where we gather in traditional and life-giving ways to pray together, and to hear and share the living story of Jesus. A story we keep very much alive by telling it and retelling it, thinking about it, interrogating it, year after year.

All the stories from Scripture that we share here will reveal deep truths with each engaged and fresh revisiting, as we wrestle with them, again, and continue to struggle to interpret them in our own context, and for our own time, together.

Story-telling truly has the power to change our hearts and minds and our lives because of the way story works on our whole self, the way stories linger with us, the way we give them life in our imagination, the way different details bump up against and schmear together with the story of our own life as it's unfolding ... as we change as we continue on life's journey. And as we change, our relationship to these great stories changes too, and with it, our understanding of them.

When I come to church, I'm hoping to find a place where we gather around the old stories, first told by our ancestors in the faith, and then retold across the millennia, so that each new generation, in each time and place, can explore in a new way the deep truths of being human, the great mystery of God, and all the ways these things are all bound up together.

Because it is all bound up together. The Resurrection story doesn't stand alone, and the tidy one-liner that "Christ died for our sins" cannot by itself ever deliver me life-altering meaning. The Resurrection story is a defining story, and also a continuing one, tangled up and all essentially connected to the great Biblical themes:

Our Scriptures tell the stories of humanity's repeated separations from God, of exile, first from Eden, from our true "home," the home of being and living in full and mutual communion with God, the planet, and with one another.

And our Scriptures tell the old stories of God's people being set free. The foundational Exodus story, the way that God leads the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, through the waters, and on, eventually, to new Covenantal life with God in the Promised Land. The Exodus is the story of the people as they pass from the death of enslavement to fullness of life in God.

And in glorious connection, the root of the Greek word for Exodus, is the same as for the word used in the Book of Acts to describe "the Way," the Way of those first followers of Jesus, also passing from 'death' to newness of life. The Way, an exodus of sorts, from our enslavement, to sin, to the ways and the powers of the world, and from all the choices we make that separate us from God and our neighbor, an exodus of sorts into newness of life as living members of the body of Christ, bound by the new Covenant given us by Jesus.

The great themes of exile and return, exodus from enslavement into freedom, time spent in the wilderness, God's promise and covenant, journey, from death into fullness of life, these are the great themes of the old stories that find new life here, as they are retold in this place, amongst all of us. These living stories, this living tradition is what I hope to find when I come to church.

And so when we proclaim Christ is Risen! may we always remember the great, old stories from which the story of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection flows. When we proclaim Christ is Risen! in this place, may we never be guilty of reducing this epic story of ongoing life in God to a flat, lifeless statement of fact, a relic from the distant past we dust off once a year.

When we proclaim Christ is Risen! and lift it high on our Alleluias may we always be mindful of the living truth of our life in Christ, that it is our Way: our Way home, out of exile; it is our Way into freedom and Covenantal fullness of life, it our Way to God's promised land where there will be peace, justice, and ample provision for all. Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen indeed, Alleluia!