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Cathedral of the Incarnation
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Alleluia. Christ is Risen.

The Lord is Risen Indeed. Alleluia.

Today is a day of joy and celebration! And I think you know why...

April the giraffe has give birth to a brand new baby. Yes! Over a million people watched yesterday as the miracle of new life streamed live on you-tube from upstate New York. Four of those people watching were in my kitchen. We shouted our support at the screen - come on April! You can do it! You've got this! Push!

As April gave birth and her baby took its first steps, I found myself in child-like awe. For a moment - just for a moment - I was fully absorbed in witnessing new life. It was an experience of profoundly ordinary holiness. Many of you have experienced this in witnessing or giving birth to your own children. What a world of wonder we live in! By God's grace, we share this extraordinary planet with mothering creatures of every kind, like April and her newborn giraffe. We behold mystery. Joy conquers despair. In the face of so much death and hardship in our world, new life persists and prevails. Alleluia.

Easter is a new day - offering us fresh opportunities to participate in God's life of justice, peace and joy - *right now*.

That may sound grandiose, but it is true. Sacred time, for Christians, moves ever forward in procession - presenting ever new opportunities to join God's reign of love. God calls to us from a future yet unknown - beckoning us to a life of greater freedom and joy that we cannot fully comprehend - and the journey begins *now*.

Today we are raised from despondency by The Truth that is for us also The Way and The Life. We are no longer bound by the past, but are freed for a more graceful future, *now*. Following Christ, our lives are not defined by the tomb, but by its emptiness. "He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said."

Every moment, from *now*, is a completely new opportunity to grow up into the full stature of Christ, our highest potential. As the great hymn *Lift Every Voice and Sing* proclaims, "Out from the gloomy past, till now we stand at last, Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast!"

Our bright star is risen. Our faces, of every shade that God made, gleam with the resurrected light of that star. Have you not seen?

Behold! Christ is alive as we live and breathe and sitting right next to you in the pew. The desolation and death of Good Friday, ever present in the world and in ourselves, is put in its place today. Annihilation is no match for the love of God. Death no longer has dominion over us. We have been

buried with Christ in our baptism and raised with him to life eternal. Sacrificial love has won the day. We are *ultimately* free.

As we sang in my sweet little village church on the North Shore of Long Island growing up: *Every morning is Easter morning from now on! Every day's Resurrection day, the past is over and gone!*

Perhaps this sounds naive or quaint to you given the troubles of the world? I wouldn't be offended or shocked at all if you are saying to yourself right now, "Sure. Great. Christ is Risen. New and abundant life. blah blah blah. It's all just a metaphor followed by an egg hunt, isn't it? Anyway, my mother made me come here. When do we get to go home and eat some ham?"

That is a completely fair and rational response to the proclamation of Christ's Resurrection in a despairing world. The Resurrection, at face value, is a hopelessly naive motif. Foolish even. Nonsensical. Not up to the challenge of the brokenness we know in the world and in ourselves. Indeed, the Resurrection cannot be comprehended at all outside the framework of faith. It can hardly be grasped even by the most devout followers of Jesus. Alongside the Incarnation, for which this Cathedral gets its name, the Passion of Christ, culminating in the Resurrection, is the animating power and driving force of Christian faith and practice. Its the energy that powers Christianity. So don't expect it to make much sense. It is mysterious and dark. It is, in the end, unintelligible.

Consider how news of the Resurrection struck the first followers of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel:

On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb where Jesus had been laid. And suddenly there was a great earthquake! (Sound effect). *Surprised you, didn't I?* There was an angel whose appearance was like lightning (read unbridled energy) and the stone had been rolled away. The men shook with fear and looked dead, but the women listened (not much has changed) and they went away with a message they did not fully comprehend, but that would change history as they and we know it. They did not understand the message, but the message took hold of them, "He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said." It's a wild story. It can't be fully understood.

But as Paul said to the Corinthians, "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are. The Resurrection is the the prime thing that is not - an empty tomb - which brings everything that is to its knees in worship. Even the mountains and trees and giraffes bow down before the Lord of Life.

Christ's Resurrection is not a sign or a symbol of the love of God - it is the love itself, which is full of emptiness. This we spend a lifetime attempting to grasp and to live.

There is no greater love than this - to lay down ones life for one's friends. This has been done for us in order to raise us to joys unknown.

The resurrecting love I am pointing to is depicted in the icon on our chancel steps today and reproduced on your bulletin cover in a traditional image called *The Harrowing of Hell*. It depicts Christ whose love for us was so great that he went to hell in order to rescue humanity from oblivion. In the icon, Christ grips Adam and Eve, all of us, by the wrists and drags them/us into an endless future of love and light. Christ does not manifest like the murmur of a dove song or the fluttering of butterfly wings in this image. But like a lifeguard pulling us from whatever pool of despair we are drowning in. Breaking the gates of our tombs, the gates of death and hades, and wrenching us into new life forever. The Resurrection, it seems, is God's love gone completely out of control. Love burst its banks and flooding us with light and life.

So, how do we respond to this love which rescues us from death? It's as simple as it is challenging. It is as practical as it is mystical. We respond by loving others as Christ loves us. That's what grace looks like in action. The Resurrection does not erase the troubles of the world or the challenges of our lives, but it raises us to confront trouble and challenge with humility and loving service of others above self.

We may not get there all at once. It's OK to ease into a life characterized by resurrection rather than Good Friday. Start small. Don't go right to step 12. Start at step 1. Put down your iPhone and greet a stranger with loving kindness. Instead of beeping your horn at someone stopped at a green light - wave, smile and practice patience. Rather than complaining about the behavior of someone you love, again, give thanks for the gift of that person in your life. Beginning this way may eventually lead you to do great things, perhaps even dangerous things. But start very small. Proclaiming the Good News starts small and it starts *now*.

Being a person of the Resurrection, a follower of Jesus today, means focusing on the solutions the world needs, not continually rehearsing the world's problems. Endlessly decrying evil in the world and blaming others for it may be a good way to get ratings, but it's not how people of faith heal a broken world by God's grace.

We who are gathered here, in Long Island's house of prayer, are called to be bearers of the Resurrection today for this island and for the world. To be the change we wish to see in the world. God has rolled away the stone from our tombs and called us forth, yanked us out, to live lives of consequence.

When we leave this place through the great East doors after this Mass, we re-enter a Good Friday world that we have been empowered and instructed to heal with God's love. The world is full of fear and doubt - violence, op-

pression and degradation. God has an response to these things. The love of Christ alive in you and me - sent forth to fill the world with hope and peace, with beauty, joy, love, grace and baby giraffes.

On Holy Tuesday, when over a hundred priests sat where you are sitting right now to renew their ordination vows to sacrificially serve the people of Long Island, we sang a poem written in the 16th Century by Theresa of Avila. It is a beautiful expression of the high calling that is yours and mine in this time after Christ's Resurrection.

Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)

Our lives, *now*, are lived in the shadow of the cross - which is our victory.
And in the light of the Resurrection - which is our destiny.

“He is not here; for he has been raised.” And we rise too. If we so choose to follow him.