

Sermon for Easter Sunday, April 8, 2012 Mark 16:1-8 "Conservation of Energy"

Where does the energy come from?

That is the question we just explored a bit with the children...we know the energy comes from God. How else might that heavy stone be moved from its position blocking the tomb?

But perhaps the more interesting question is where the energy goes...

I was no science whiz in school, but I vaguely recall from my high school physics class the first law of thermodynamics, also known as the law of conservation of energy. Here's how it goes: energy cannot be created or destroyed. It simply changes form.

What does that look like in science? Take water, apply some heat, and it turns into a vapor. An even simpler example: Rubbing your hands together generates heat on your palms. This is not actually creating energy. The work of your muscles takes the chemical energy of your body, changes it to work energy in your muscles, and then into friction (heat) energy in your skin. You've actually moved energy from your body through your muscles and into your hands. There is a fixed amount of energy in a closed system, and while you can change its form, you cannot destroy it.

And there may be something there for us to explore on this beautiful day when we remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead.

Think about it: Jesus Christ, the son of God, killed on a cross just a few days ago, now conquering death and alive. He is alive! Is it a miracle or simply an expression of that first law of thermodynamics? He is God, after all, the purest form of energy that we might imagine. If God were not energy, could there have been a creation? And if God is energy, God cannot be killed. That primal energy can, however, be transformed, can't it?

In a sense, this is what seems to be happening as we hear this story.

Jesus died. No one who witnessed it had any doubt about it. His lifeless body was placed in a tomb, washed and prepared as was the custom, wrapped in clean linen, and then the huge stone was put in place, blocking the opening, letting no light or air into that space. It seemed that all energy, all life force, had left him. That body was no more than an empty shell.

I suspect that his mother and his disciples asked the same question we ask, when we behold the body of one whom we loved who has died. Where did he go? His energy, his vibrancy, his soul was no longer there. They felt the absence of that life-energy deeply.

But if energy is neither created nor destroyed, but transformed, it had to go somewhere.

And this is where this idea gets really interesting.

Where did the Jesus that they knew, the teacher, the rabbi, the son, the friend, go?

We hear in the Nicene Creed that after Jesus was buried, he descended to the dead, and on the third day – today, Easter Day – he rose from the dead.

If you look at ancient Russian icons depicting the resurrection, you will see a triumphant Christ standing above Hell with the gates of Hell broken open. Why? Because, by his death, Jesus descends into the underworld to free the captive sinners from their sins. The icons show the broken chains and locks that had held the sinners in bondage. The energy of Jesus breaks the chains of the captives, the dead souls in Hell, and sets them free. In those Russian icons, it looks like he is exploding with an energy that could not be destroyed by death.

And yet we know he died.

This is where his power, his energy is transformed most remarkably.

Jesus Christ destroyed death – the death of those souls – by his own death. His own force of divine love and his sacrificial act infused the captives with his energy, saving them and us from eternal death.

What a powerful kind of energy! No wonder the disciples ran from that empty tomb...a tidal wave of divine energy was rolling toward them.

Now I know that this is pretty heavy going theologically. It is hard to imagine Jesus as a love-charged energy source. But bear with me, because it has a bearing on each and every one of us here today.

If you had a source of energy that could run your car without a trip to the Shell station, wouldn't that get you excited?

If you had a source of energy that meant that you wouldn't have to pay the oil company to fill up the tank to heat your home, wouldn't that get you excited?

Well, imagine an energy source that is so boundless and so generous that you can never use it up. Imagine that its sole purpose is to build you up, to fill you with joy, to save you from the things you wish you hadn't done, to draw you closer to the one who loves you most.

And now imagine that all that beautiful energy is absolutely free.

Astonishing, isn't it?

That's what you get today. The Jesus Christ who walked the paths of the Galilee and Jerusalem over two thousand years ago died on a cross, but his energy was not destroyed on that cross. In fact, in a way it was released. It was made available to all of us, to heal us and to strengthen us, to warm us and to comfort us, to challenge us and to applaud us.

God's energy may have resided in the life force in a carpenter's son, but it didn't remain the same. It was transformed by the death of that carpenter's son, into the spiritual force of the King of glory. His energy has not been created. It was not destroyed. It has always been and will always be. And it is available to us all, for the love of us by the one who made us.

So today we sing "Alleluia!" There is no better word of thanks for the gift of the energy that fills our hearts and souls and lungs than to say it loud: Alleluia!

Amen.