Unless you are pretty new to this church thing, I think you know what event we are commemorating today and it is not the feast of the holy lilies. It is Easter Sunday and despite what the advertising industry tells us, today is the most important day on the Christian Calendar. Because, without today, nothing in our earthly life has changed – there is still unforgiven sin and there is still death. However, we have Easter and because of that everything has changed. Christ is risen and a path has been opened for us to spend eternity in the presence of God. And that is, of course, a really big deal. But, I think, looking back across history humanity has been slow to recognize or even resistant to seeing this change. And I don’t say this just because Easter is a somewhat ignored holiday in our day and age. I say this because missing what happened on Easter has a very long tradition and is even present in our reading from the Gospel this morning. That is how far back it goes.

Today we hear this: “Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.’" Now please don’t think what I am about to say is in anyway a criticism of Mary Magdelene. I mean if you look at the behavior of the disciples and the other followers of Jesus over the past few days, Mary probably comes out near the top, but even with that she still does not get it. The statement she makes this morning is built around keeping everything the same. In her formulation, Jesus’ death is just like everyone else’s death, the only difference, in this case, is that someone has taken the body of the deceased and Mary is weeping because of this final indignity. The statement Mary makes assumes that past performance is indicative of future results. When she says, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him” she is completely validating the system of this fallen world. People die and after they die, they stay dead and if we cannot find the body the only explanation is that someone has taken it and physically had it moved. We are not told who the “they” are in her statement. Maybe she thinks it is the high priests or maybe the Romans, but whoever it is, it really doesn’t matter. What matters is she is convinced that there is something earthly which has the power to heap one more disgrace upon Jesus. And if that is in fact what happened then that means nothing has changed this morning. It means that God came to earth to save us from sin, but in the end, sin won the day. It nailed Jesus to the cross and he died. But on this Easter day, we as Christians announce that this is not the way it happened. “They” did not win. God won. That is why we say Christ rose victorious from the grave. But here is the tricky part -- it is fairly easy to come on Easter Sunday and announce that Christ is risen. It’s fun, we get to sing stirring hymns like *Love’s Redeeming Work is Done* and you might even get a chocolate bunny to boot. But the thing about Easter is that Easter is a reality every day. It is not something we put in a box and bring out next Spring. And so what we need to ask ourselves is will we live that way or will we be like Mary in this moment and say we can’t because “they” have too much power over us?

There is an Old Far Side cartoon showing a woman who has barged into a room with a Do Not Disturb sign on the door. Inside she sees a man surrounded by phones with two receivers up to his ears. She says, “YOU, Bernie Horowitz?....So YOU’RE the ‘they’ in “that’s what they say?” It’s funny because at one time or another we have all assigned some thought or opinion to a nebulous “they”. My grandmother was famous for these. Whenever I was doing something of which she disapproved (which was most of the time) she would tell me about some group of people who agreed wholeheartedly with her assessment of my behavior. In other words, I should stop doing what I was doing because “they” did not like it. But more broadly speaking I think “they” can be anything in our lives that prevents us from seeing what God has done and is doing. And by blocking us from seeing God we actually are prevented from doing what God asks of us. I think that in most of these times there really is not a “they” just as there was no “they” this morning, rather there is simply a mental block. And these mental blocks, no matter what name we assign them, prevent us from seeing God.

I am sure that I have used this story before but I live a boring life so I run out of new and amusing anecdotes. Years ago, our toaster broke and so we had to get a new one. Our old toaster was white and oblong and our new one was black and more squat. Anyway, for months after getting the new toaster I would look in the cupboard and not be able to find it, even though it was right in front of me. The reason for this was that I was looking for something white and oblong. My brain was telling me that toasters could only look one way and so I was unable to see the actual toaster in front of me. No one was deceiving me or playing tricks on me, rather my mind was so made up that it would not and could not see reality.

Many people, including many Christians, complain that God is not present enough in the world, but I wonder if that is true or if what is really going on is we have something in our mind that is not allowing us to see what God is doing. For a moment Mary could not see the Resurrection because she was sure that “they” had taken away the body of Jesus. And so the question for us is what are our “theys.” What are the things that we have in our minds that obscure what God is doing? They might be preconceived notions or they might be the distractions that we fill our lives with these days. I mean honestly, if God descended from heaven, would anyone notice? Or would we continue to stare at our smart phones and not bother to look up? In Psalm 46 we read, “Be still, and know that I am God.” If knowing God requires stillness, we should ask if we are we actually taking the time to be still or are we occupying our lives with “theys” that prevent us from being still and seeing that Christ is truly risen?

Today is a joyous and triumphant occasion. A day that tells us that the trajectory of humanity has changed. We are no longer caught in the trap of sin and death but rather have truly been raised with Christ. But that is not enough. It is not enough to just live like this for a few moments on Easter Morning. Rather the call is for us to live into it each and every day. St. Paul tells us, “I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” That is what happened on Easter and our only job is to clear away the “theys” that stop us from fully living into this reality so that we may be God’s own not just this morning or this day but forevermore.