My Brothers and Sisters in Christ, let us pray. Lord God of our Easter Hearts, Minds, Spirits, and Souls, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

“Free At Last, Free At Last, Thank God Almighty, We’re Free at Last!” These words are part of our lexicon as being some of the most famous of the civil rights movement, aren’t they? They’re remembered as the closing words of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s “I Have A Dream” speech, but they are actually from a spiritual called, fittingly enough, “Free at Last”. Here are those words:

*Way down yonder in the graveyard walk,*

*Me and my Jesus goin’ to meet and talk,*

*On my knees when the light passed by,*

*Thought my soul would rise and fly.*

*Some of these mornings, bright and fair,*

*Goin to meet King Jesus in the air.*

*Free at last, free at last,*

*Thank God Almighty, I’m free at last!*

The freedom described in the spiritual is freedom that originates from life after death. It speaks eloquently and simply of being freed from death’s consequences. And that’s what makes it so good to talk about today, this day of resurrection. For only Jesus’ resurrection upended death’s consequences truly and fully. But that’s not something just to believe in. Resurrection must be lived for and reached for in the here and now to really make meaningful change in the Kingdom of God, where we are right here, right now, this Easter Sunday.

Our scripture begins early in the morning, it says, the first day of the week, not a Monday, but Sunday. The tomb Jesus was laid in was a larger one donated by their friend Joseph of Arimathea. The authorities had ordered it sealed with a large rock to prevent graverobbers from coming and carrying off the body or some such like that. So the women arrive tasked with anointing Jesus’ body with spices to help mask the odor of decomposition, but they hadn’t thought of who might let them in by rolling away the large stone at the entrance.

And then they come to the tomb, not expecting the stone to be rolled away. Graverobbers? Should they enter? They do, but surely with a frightened trepidation. And who do they find there but an angel of the Lord, who says, “don’t be alarmed”. Really? “Jesus, the one who was crucified, has risen”. OK, that’s pretty obvious, and if I were in their shoes at this point I’d be saying, “I am very alarmed! What have you done with our Jesus?”

Here they are in the tomb. They had just seen Jesus crucified 48 hours ago, poked in the side, blood and water coming out of his body as the last act of dying, everything that has happened to them this weekend has said, “death”. They come to the tomb expecting death. But they get an empty tomb and a young kid saying otherwise. “He is risen”.

They are told to witness the place where he was laid. They saw where he was wrapped and laid and sealed up. Yet he’s not there, he’s risen, and gone ahead. All these years later, our Easter experience of astonishment and wonder replicates that first Easter and what happened at the tomb.

They expected death, and are met with emptiness. Only then are they told and getting a word about resurrection. This is exactly what happens to us in our world today. We come to many things in our world knowing exactly the outcomes and expectations. We know the answers before the questions are even posed. Take climat change for example. We see the insects disappearing from our flower beds because crop seeds now grow with insecticide in their genome. Up to 80,000 bees can die for each corn stalk encountered. Almost 10 billion Alaska snow crabs disappeared in the Bering Sea due to ocean warming…just gone from one year to the next. We have the expectation of a world dying all around us. But then we receive word of a resurrection. Resurrection means that what we see isn’t all there is. But resurrection thinking and life requires big changes.

God seems to like to do stuff the hard way. The women saw Jesus suffer and die…why doesn’t Jesus just walk out into the light of day, spare us the disappearing drama? No, we have to come to Easter as they did, the resurrection isn’t something that is on our minds. Because it flies in the face of what we know to be true.

Mark’s story gives us this version of an unsettling prequel. Hope doesn’t come instantaneously. The women first respond with silence, and maybe fear. If we take the resurrection seriously, then, maybe our first response should be unsettled. What can be more disorienting for us than to know that death can be overcome, that the fate of our world is not ending like we and alllll the scientists say it will? What does that say about our needing to move forward again, rather than hunker down and prepare for death?

What does it take to move past trembling? What must we do to believe that the impossible is possible, to enter the mind of Greta Thunberg, to be that free? We can’t keep coming to the tomb again only to leave with some new belief, can we? The sisters didn’t just believe Jesus died. They watched it, lived it are still mourning it. They didn’t go through all that just to show up and recite a prayer. There must be more.

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts.

We need to not just think critically about this event and how it’s in our lives, but we need to feel it too.

Resurrection doesn’t allow halfway belief, either Jesus got up and went or he didn’t. If we really believe that he got up, that belief should transform our daily life. Who we are and what we do has to be different. We have to move past trembling, stationary fear and silence. Belief in the resurrection is more than simply responding to a survey on belief. Belief, like the Bible, depends and rests on conversion of hearts, not minds. We have to change our very existence and how we perceive all around us, right here, right now.

We are free from the normal bounds of death’s consequences. We are free to exist in this world in the newfound consequence of resurrection and getting a new expectation. We can have confidence that breaks the chain of limitations, the bounds of economic and political power, the strata of society that seeks to keep things just the way they are.

At its heart, resurrection helps break the chains of our own hearts, minds, souls, and Spirit to be at our best in this world. Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty we’re free at last. Thanks be to God, Amen.