

The Church of the Good Shepherd

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Easter Sunday – April 21, 2019

Luke 24:1-12

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.” Alleluia, Alleluia!

Wow! What a story, huh? And I don't just mean what we heard this morning of the empty tomb and the angelic pronouncement that God raised Jesus from the dead. I mean this whole story of Holy Week. From the Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem through Jesus' resurrection, this story has got it all: supernatural beings; political intrigue; a big feast; betrayal and denial; violence and death; perplexity and sorrow, and, at last, a divine act so shocking that nothing has been the same since. This is not merely Jesus' story, but *our* story as well: a story of the resurrecting power of God's love and grace, and of God's continual presence and work in the world renewing and redeeming His good creation.

In the church, we remember the key events of this story each year through the drama of our worship. We sing hosannas and wave palm branches as Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem. We wonder at the beauty of the last supper where Jesus washed his disciples' feet and gave them the seemingly impossible command to always love, and then instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist through which we are brought into the new covenant with God through Christ's body and blood. We then accompany Jesus into the garden at Gethsemane and watch and pray with him during his time of anguish. We are present with him as he is arrested and tried before Pilate and the chief priests and is sentenced to die. We witness his suffering as he is beaten and humiliated; we walk with him as he carries his cross; and we watch, horrified, as he is crucified, dies, and is laid in the tomb. And then we sit in the emptiness and silence of Holy Saturday, acutely feeling Jesus' absence from this world.

And now...now it is morning on the third day and, to our continual surprise, the story continues. Rising early, the women who had been present with Jesus through all of this begin their solemn journey. In the weak early dawn light, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary “the mother of James” walk to where they had seen Jesus laid in the tomb. They carry with them the jars of spices and ointment they will use to prepare Jesus' body for burial. They also carry with them their deep sorrow and grief. As they approach the tomb where Jesus' body had been laid, they see that the large stone covering the opening has been rolled away. When they enter, they find the tomb empty. While the women stand there perplexed, still clutching their jars, two angelic figures suddenly appear and tell them the impossible and unexplainable truth that God has raised their Lord and Messiah from the dead.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen,” the angels say to these frightened and confused women. Despite all appearances to the contrary, God has not abandoned them and is, in fact, fulfilling his promises to His people. Through Jesus, God has defeated death and resurrected new and everlasting Life, and that it is through this Life that God is redeeming all of his beloved Creation.

The women then do the only thing they can do in light of this revelation of new life in their midst – they run to tell others what they have witnessed. This truth is now too big, too shocking, too awe-some to keep private and treasure in their hearts. They cannot contain this news. They have to do what everyone who has since experienced resurrection must do: they have to share it. And so they hurry to Jesus' disciples to share with them what they experienced. These women become the first apostles of the resurrection.

A birth of grace and truth took place that morning within these women, and, eventually, within all of the disciples, and they became not merely followers of Christ but bearers of his Life. We, too, are called to bear Christ's life within us and to tell the story – to share this good news of

God's work in Jesus, and, maybe even more importantly, to share our own stories of how the resurrecting power of love and hope has given *each* of us new life. Like the first apostles of the resurrection, we cannot contain this story amongst ourselves – we must share it!

Now, I know that, as Episcopalians, we practically break out in hives at the mention of the “e”-word. You know that word.... “*evangelism*”. We almost have to whisper it – like your did grandmother when she told you that her good friend got *cancer*. But, please don't run away yet! I am not suggesting that anyone go knocking on doors, handing out leaflets and asking folks uncomfortably personal questions. I don't really think that approach works all that well, anyway.

However, we are called to share the Christian story of God's work of salvation through the person of Jesus. And I believe that story is best told from within our own personal stories –our stories of new and surprising life found within what had been dead; of comfort and salvation found in the midst of suffering and loneliness; of the unexpected still, small voice that spoke to us when we were hurting or confused; of the powerful movements of the Spirit in our lives that occurred when we least expected it. These are stories that we can and must share. Our personal stories of resurrection, both great and small, found within our lives help bring the cosmic story of God's redeeming work within creation into human scale. Our stories of surprising new life found in our ordinary lives, here and now, bring the gift of hope to others that they, too, may encounter God in their lives.

And, in some way, our experiences of resurrection are not entirely real to us until we share them with others. We are story-telling, meaning-making creatures. Sharing our stories seems to be an integral part of our nature. Think about the countless number of books that have been published, radio and television programs produced, movies and plays, diaries and blogs.... these all attest to our need to tell stories of life and death, joy and anger, suffering and redemption. But there are no more important stories to share than our own encounters of resurrection, and the presence of God's grace in our lives. These are the stories that the hurting and lonely world is dying for. These are the stories that give others the lenses through which they may see how God is working through real and imperfect lives here and now.

But most of us worry that we don't have any great story to tell, I mean, not everyone can come across the empty tomb or be visited by the risen Lord in a locked room. In response to our excuses and protests, our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry has preached that, “we all have a story to tell, a story filled with hope and love and God's grace and mercy. We've got a story of God in our lives, a story of ways that Jesus has already been working in our lives, sometimes without our even knowing... Every one of us sitting here has a story of God in our life already.”

We need to have the courage to look at our lives, to open our eyes and ears to the sometimes subtle, sometimes outrageous, movements of the Spirit. We need to listen to others' stories to help us shape and sharpen our vision. And then, we've got to start telling our own stories. Me, and you, and you, and you...all of us. We need to share our stories. Whether they be small stories of being surprised by daily graces or big stories of spiritual death and resurrection, they have the power to heal and transform. The world is desperately waiting for your stories of resurrection and grace.

I leave you now with my very favorite benediction that, I feel, is particularly appropriate for this morning – for the paschal fire that I pray has been lit within each of your hearts this Easter.

Let us pray. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May God give you the grace not to sell yourself short, the grace to risk something big for something good; the grace to remember that the world is now too dangerous for anything but truth, and too small for anything but love. So, may God take your minds and think through them. May God take your lips and speak through them. May God take your hands and work through them. May God take your hearts and set them on fire. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.