

Easter Sunday April 15 2022

Luke 24:1-12

Alleluia Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

Siblings in Christ, friends, family, all those who are visiting us today. This is the first time we have assembled inside for Easter in three years. It is good that we are here.

As human beings, we love a good story. From the Epic of Gilgamesh to the Illiad and the Odyssey. From the stories of King Arthur to the Grapes of Wrath, we have a craving for stories that shape our lives. Today, we invest time, energy, emotion, into epics like the Harry Potter series, or Game of Thrones, in the Marvel Universe, or Star Wars, or Star Trek. Finding depth and meaning in every detail.

Today, in our Gospel text, we have the culmination of what has been called the greatest story ever told. Let everyone who has ears to hear, listen.

It started, for us, just shy of four months ago, but in the text about thirty years ago with the birth of Jesus under strange circumstances. The same Jesus who, upon being baptized by his cousin John, is stirred by a Spirit that has been driving him since childhood to go into the world and proclaim the message of God for God's creation- a message of peace; of release for the captives, sight for those who cannot see, to set those oppressed free. Who brought healing and wholeness to a broken and fractured world. Whose message is for everyone.

It culminated this past week, as we witnessed Jesus being greeted last Sunday as a conquering king with palm branches and shouts of Hosanna! As we walked with

Jesus as he taught in the Temple, engaging with the faithful and the priests. Discomfiting them with his questions and parables. To Thursday night, gathered around the table with his disciples including the one who would betray him, washing their feet in a selfless act of service. To his being arrested, beaten, crucified, buried.

Now, today, the women, the same ones who had followed Jesus the 65 plus miles to Jerusalem from Galilee, who had trailed behind him as he stumbled to the cross, who bore witness as he hung there for hours. Who with the others of his disciples stood and watched as the battered body that was Jesus breathed his last, who saw him lowered to the ground and taken by Joseph of Arimathea to a tomb not far away, these women who had gathered the needed items to anoint Jesus' body and then, trusting in the command of their God, observed the Sabbath day of rest. Waiting. Waiting to express their love for Jesus one last time. To wash his scourged back, to smooth his pierced brow, to touch those hands that healed so many, to anoint not just his feet, but his whole body before placing it in the tomb, sealing the door, and walking away. Jesus, of blessed memory.

These same women come at the crack of dawn on the first day of the week. No more waiting for them, eager to perform this one final act of love for their teacher, master, Lord. Going just as soon as it was decent for them to do so. What was that like for them? To go and anticipate the encounter with the broken body of Jesus. They must have approached the tomb with the same dread people have approached the formerly occupied cities in Ukraine that have become infamous these past weeks; Chernahiv, Bucha, Mariupol. Approached knowing

what they would find. Tear rise almost unbidden. For we have all experienced these moments, haven't we? Approaching the physical embodiment of death. Of loss. Of a cruel world in which brutality and death seems to win.

But, the tomb, guarded by a huge rock is open. What is this? They enter fearing, cautious. The body is gone. They stand there, at a loss for what to think or do. Perhaps afraid the authorities have taken his body.

Then, two men, with clothes flashing like lightning. The women, terrified, fall face down on the floor. The men speak, "Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He is arisen! Remember, recall, how he spoke of this moment. Of how he would suffer these things and rise again."

Then, the lightbulb flashes. They remember! They were there to hear Jesus' words. Yes! Like all the other things he has said to them, this is true! They return to the eleven, those closest to Jesus, beloved disciples. They bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus- the first preachers of the Good News, these women. These faithful disciples. Filled with awe and joy. With hope for the tomb is empty!

But they are dismissed. What silly nonsense. Brushed aside with a sexist, it is the idle gossip of women. It makes no sense.

But Peter- the one who denied Jesus three times that night in a bid to save his own life. Because he feared the cost of his following Jesus. Peter, who had wept bitterly over his betrayal of Jesus. Who, even more than the other disciples, must have felt hopeless, worthless, adrift hears the words of the women and in that moment in that hearing, he got up, literally it is that he was resurrected, the same language as used for what happened to Jesus. And arisen Peter runs to the tomb.

This is no jog, but a full effort sprint. Of at least three quarters of a mile. How desperate he must have been. A desperation that drove his speed. Desperate for another chance, desperate for redemption, to say to Jesus how sorry he was to reject him, how he would never turn from him again. Desperate to be free from his guilt. Desperate for life with Jesus once again.

I don't think Peter stooped to look into the tomb as much as fell to his knees, chest heaving as he sought to bring air into his burning lungs. Eyes stinging with a combination of sweat and tears. Almost prostrate in desperation for the proclamation of the women to be true. And as he panted, out of breath, Peter looked, Peter saw for himself, the tomb empty, the graves clothes cast aside, unnecessary- for the one wearing them was very much alive. And after catching his breath. The same breath that God breathed into Adam. A breath of life. Peter goes on his way, astounded- dumbstruck by hope. Hope that Jesus was alive and loose in the world once again. Hope for himself, that he too might live again, with Jesus. But also, resurrected. Brought to life again.

I proclaim to you today, nonsense. Silliness. An idle tale. Something that the Apostle Paul calls a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the rest. That Jesus of Nazareth was indeed God's Son. That he rose from the dead. That in him you find the greatest understanding of who God the Creator of All that Exists is.

We are a people craving for a story to shape our lives. But it is the ones we too often latch onto that are the idle tales. Wonderful stories, certainly. But fiction.

This story, of Jesus, is truth. And it is life. Life fuller and more abundant than anything an author can dream up.

It sounds so silly because it rests on God's wisdom, not our own. That has been our flaw from the beginning, the deep-seated belief that we don't need God. That we can do a better job running the joint. Because what God requires doesn't seem right to us. Love our enemy? Pray for those who persecute us? Putin? Really? Wash the feet of the one who will betray us? Love without precondition? God's way makes no sense to us. Doesn't seem fair to us. And so we are separated from God- like the younger son we strike out on our own- believing we can do with this inheritance what we wish.

But what a mess we have made. Look around, friends. Are we really better on our own? Living in a world we have ravaged with our wastefulness, with our petty hatreds and wars. Where some have more than they could ever need, and others don't have anything approaching enough. Shakespeare in the mouth of Macbeth summarized it best, life by human rules "is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

But Jesus has come to free us from that destructive nonsense. To remind us that the true story of our lives lies in the God who sent him into the world, who raised him from the dead. Who is all about resurrection for what looks dead (why do you think Easter is in spring!), redemption for those who society would write off, second chances even for those who deny him. This God who in Jesus raises up the lowly and who loves everyone with wild extravagance. Even those who crucified him, "Father forgive them, they do not know what they are doing."

There is more to this story. Of resurrected Peter, who denied Jesus three times, becoming the foundation for the Church of Jesus Christ. Faithful even to his own crucifixion. Redemption indeed. Of the eleven who thought this news of

resurrection was an idle tale, becoming the apostles who would carry this good news of God in Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. Flawed people, to be sure, imperfect vessels to carry this good news, but faithful.

There is more to this story, because now it is yours. Because you are part of it. Because you bear the image of the Living God within yourself. All of you. Because some of you have been claimed by God in the waters of baptism and been marked with the cross of Christ. Because God in Jesus Christ loves you with wild abandon and calls you to follow him on the way.

This story is yours to live even if you have denied knowing God like Peter, if you thought this was all an idle tale like the eleven. If you are deeply flawed, like all of the disciples. It is your story.

This is a story that is not finished, because you are part of it. I invite you back next week, to hear and be the next part of the story. To look and find all those ways God has already been at work in your life. To be forgiven, again. To be resurrected, again. To be loved with wild abandon, always. To be sent to tell others, all that God in Jesus Christ has done for you.

My English teacher always pushed us to summarize our readings. Okay, here is the summary for today. God is love, unrestricted. The tomb is empty. Death and cruelty do not have the final say. Alleluia! Christ is Risen. Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!