

“The Lord is Risen Indeed”

Easter Day – Luke 24:1-10

preached by the Rector at St. Paul’s, Henderson, March 31, 2012

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Alelluia! Christ is risen. <The Lord is risen indeed. Alelluia!> It’s good to see all of you here this morning. For those that don’t know it, we have services at St. Paul’s *every* Sunday morning at 8:00 and 10:00.

One of the great joys of being from a larger family, is that I have a veritable treasure trove of stories that I can tell about my siblings when they aren’t here to defend themselves. Actually, I suppose whether or not that is a *joy* depends a good deal on one’s position in the order of things. In point of fact, I was the *oldest* of the five children in our family, so while the others are stuck telling stories about how boring I was as a teenager, since, as I’ve told you before, I was such a *model* child, I am blessed with stories that, because of my siblings’ more tender years, can sometimes make them look a little foolish.

One such story is about my youngest brother, Doug, who is six years, one and a half months my junior and is now the father of four and the Acolyte Master at Saint James’ Cathedral in South Bend, Indiana. It seems to me that at the time of this particular story, however, I was about nine, which would have made Doug three or so. As I said, I was a model child, so it was probably my sister, Becky who one lazy summer afternoon came up with the idea to try out the old Indonesian Monkey Trap – on our little Dougie.

We made our trap using one of those old narrow-mouthed Mason jars and tied it to the chain-link fence of our backyard. We then baited it with a single Oreo cookie. (You know, that’s the *other* reason I think this must have been my sister’s idea. I clearly remember that we baited that trap with *my* cookie.) Anyway, we showed Doug the cookie in the jar and told him he could have it if he just reached in and got it. Doug, being a genuine member of the Martindale clan, *loved* cookies, and smiling from ear to ear, he reached in. The trap worked exactly as advertised: his small hand went easily into the mouth of the jar, but once wrapped around the cookie, it would not come out again. Convinced of both the effectiveness *and* the hilarity of our scheme, Becky and I ran back over to the other side of the yard to rejoin our other brothers in our favorite summer afternoon activity, shouting and splashing in the cooling spray from the sprinkler, all the while laughing and taunting Dougie. Doug was stuck on the horns of a *genuine* dilemma. On one hand (the free one, I suppose – sorry, I couldn’t resist) he really, *really* wanted to join us in the sprinklers. On the other hand, extra cookies were hard to come by in our family, especially the store-bought kind, and Doug was *certainly* not willing to let go of that cookie.

Of course, being a three-year-old boy, not an Indonesian monkey, Doug didn’t take nearly long enough to figure out the puzzle. All too quickly for our sadistic pleasure (I mean Becky’s of course – I was feeling very sorry for him, I’m sure) all too quickly, Doug pulled his hand from the jar, dumped the cookie into his *other* hand and came trotting over to the rest of us, with his hard-won prize already staining his triumphant grin with that goeey Oreo blackness. Still, it *was* great fun for those few moments anyway, watching him stuck by his own indecision.

This morning we are gathered here once again in our Easter finest to hear the story to end all stories. And I’d hate to disappoint anyone. First the basic background stuff in case you were busy this past week – picking out your Easter outfit, buying candy and Easter dinner fixin’s, that sort of thing – and didn’t get to the worship services where we covered all this in more detail. After having a rather important, last meal with his disciples, Jesus goes to a garden where he prayed. There he was arrested and charged with blasphemy against God and sedition against the Emperor. After a rather unusual trial, even by first-century standards, Jesus was condemned to die. He was taken to a place outside Jerusalem

called the “The Skull,” nailed to a cross and crucified. It was late Friday afternoon when he finally died and they took him down off the cross. It was so late, in fact, that they had to rush to get his body in the tomb before the Sabbath started at sunset. There wasn’t even time for his friends and loved ones to properly prepare his body for burial, since you weren’t allowed to do that sort of work on the Sabbath.

So very early Sunday morning, the two Marys, Joanna and apparently a few other women went to the place where they had buried Jesus. They wanted to see the tomb. They wanted to mourn the man whom they had loved, the man whom they had followed and served throughout his ministry, the man whom they had seen crucified and buried a few days before. But when they got there, to their amazement the tomb was open – and empty! No doubt scratching their heads at the mess that had been made of their plans to care for their friend, the women stood there a moment asking each other, “Okay, what do we do now?” Then all of a sudden, there were two men standing there with them – two men dressed in dazzling robes! Like you or I would be, I suspect, the women were more than just a bit startled – they were terrified! They fell to the ground, afraid to even look at these messengers. “Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” the men asked. “He is not here, but has risen.”

Jesus was not in the tomb that morning. He was alive! The women had been there when he had died on a cross – they had seen the lashes and the nails and the spear. They had been there when the lifeless body of their friend, their master, their Lord had been lowered into his mother’s arms and they had been there when he had been laid in the tomb. But now he is no longer among the dead but *lives* again!

The temptation must have been great for the women to just stay put with their faces in the dust. Maybe they were tempted to linger at the tomb, marveling at the wonderful sight. Maybe they wanted nothing more than to go someplace quiet and try to figure out what exactly had happened. Maybe they were quite sure that no one would believe the witness of a handful of grief-stricken women. Maybe they wanted to hold tightly onto the story, *their* story, tethered to the now empty, now *useless* tomb of the risen Christ. Instead, those faithful, *faith-filled* women left that tomb that morning and found the rest of the disciples to tell *them* the story. At first the disciples didn’t believe them, but the women kept telling the story. And they *kept* telling the story. And they *kept* telling the story – until one of the disciples, Peter, *ran* to the tomb to see for himself. And then the women *and* Peter kept telling the story. And they *kept* telling the story. And they *kept* telling the story – until *all* of the disciples knew the power of Christ’s resurrection. And then *all* of them kept telling the story. And they *kept* telling the story. And they *kept* telling the story – until, fanned by the flames of power of the Holy Spirit, the story of the death of Death the story of the resurrection of Life, took hold in heart after heart after heart after heart. Until this morning we once again gather here – in a part of the world and a time in history that the women at that empty tomb never knew or imagined. We gather once again to celebrate this the holiest season of the Christian year. We gather once again to gaze at the brilliance of an *empty* tomb. We gather once again to hear this glorious, fantastic, awesome story. Alleluia! Christ is risen. <The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!>

Like the women that first Resurrection morning, we may be tempted to freeze in amazement at the wonder. We may be tempted to stay, to bask in the glow of this miracle of miracles. We may be tempted to analyze and to hypothesize and to scrutinize this glorious event until we *understand* it all.

But like the women at the tomb, *we* are called once again to go and keep telling the story – and we simply can’t engage that calling, we simply can’t fulfill that mission, we simply can’t be true to that story... and still keep one hand wrapped around the cookie in the jar. As much as we might feel shocked into insensibility and immobility by so wonderful and gracious a story, only when we shake off the impotency of indecision and fear, will the story of the Risen Christ become a *reality* that makes a difference in our lives. As much as we might like to have the how’s and the when’s and the wherefore’s worked out for our modern, rational, analytical minds, only when we accept the mission to tell everyone, everyone, *everyone* about this glorious, wonderful, saving sight, will we truly *know* the one who took on death itself for *our* sake – and won. As much as we might like to stay and stare into the brightness of the

empty tomb, only when we begin to do the work he has given us to do will we be saying with our lives what we sing this holy season with our lips:

Alelluia! Christ is risen. <The Lord is risen indeed. Alelluia!> Amen.