

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
THE WORSHIP OF GOD • APRIL 21, 2019
EASTER SUNDAY

Litany

Based on Psalm 118

There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous.

Christ is risen!

We shall not die, but live, and recount the deeds of the Lord.

Christ is risen!

The stone the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

Christ is risen!

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed!

The Scripture

Luke 24:1-12

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

The Message

Life Enough

Nick Larson and Terry Overfelt

Nick:

The gospel of Luke begins this morning with breaking the silence as we begin to hear how women among them planned to go to the tomb and give Jesus' body a proper cleaning and anointing, a suitable wrapping and an appropriate burial for their friend

and teacher (Martin Marty). Imagine with me for a moment the dawning shadows stretching across the path as the women walked to the place where Jesus was laid.

Terry:

The who?

Nick:

The women.

Their shadows must have woven their way among the shadows of the landscape. Their early morning shadows stretched at length before them. Feel now upon your face the early morning light, the cresting of the sun, the breaking of the silence with the women's footsteps along the path, crunching the dirt beneath their sandals.

Terry:

I bet they had cute sandals.

Nick:

When they arrived to see the stone at the opening rolled away, what do you imagine their perplexed faces looked like? Are their mouths gapping, as open and empty as the tomb?

For us today, this is no shock, there is no surprise on Easter morning. Our expectation is that Christ has risen! Indeed, we spend 364 days a year with a living Savior, only for the day between his death on Good Friday to this very morning does our Savior remain in the tomb. Yet for all his early disciples, for these women, this wasn't the case.

Terry:

Certainly not for the women!

Nick:

Okay, Terry. Would you like to come up here and join me? You are clearly having trouble staying **idle** during this sermon.

Terry:

It's no idle tale, Nick. Thank you for the invitation. I will gladly join you. May I continue?

Nick:

Please.

Terry:

This idle tale the disciples thought the women were telling, while they were hiding, they have abandoned him, denied him, betrayed him. Running from the soldiers, doubting

their Messiah, they are experiencing the loss of their purpose, disconnecting from the one who taught their values, While the women are likely not military targets, the disciples are experiencing a deep and overwhelming sense of loss.

Think for a moment, how just last week on Palm Sunday we entered Jerusalem with waving of branches, crowds parading, saying, “Hosanna to our Prince of Peace, Hosanna to King of Kings.” We were proclaiming, “Save Us and Praise, or Please and thank you.” There is probably even a palm leaf somewhere here between the seats. Despite our best efforts to move on, we got stopped in the midst of our Hosanna’s with the greatest sorrowful, difficult, important passion of our Christian story.

Our very familiarity with this Easter scene often hinders our attention from pausing and looking into to what we miss in these gospel accounts. We might miss what happened between the Hosanna’s and today’s long-awaited Hallelujah. We might miss seeing and freeing ourselves. So, let us look to see ourselves in these disciples, beginning with Peter.

Peter, the one who denied him three times, the one eager to act and join into the fray. Peter, also the one whose despair darkened his heart among the flicker of the camp fires, as he claimed to not know the one who has changed his life and charged him to build the church.

So, let us ask ourselves: Where are our denials? Where have we lost that sense of wonder and awe? Where have you allowed the details of the broken world that surrounds us to steal away the sense of being held? Most of us have felt the overwhelming grief of deeply denying something that we absolutely knew to be true.

Nick:

John, the one whom Jesus loved, sorrowful at the foot of the cross, longing for his friend to come down. Taking instead the charge to become Mary’s son. John, whose despair emptied him, leaving him hollow, the despair that was echoing inside with the pain of loss.

What are our losses? Who among us doesn’t grieve what could or would have been if we had acted differently in a specific moment? Most know the incapacitating paralysis of being stuck. Unable to move forward, recounting the past, entombed in a moment.

Terry:

What about Thomas? Thomas, who we know as one for whom seeing is believing. What did he just witness? He saw his friend, mentor, leader, his Lord, be ripped from his mission because he would not turn away. Thomas had completely accepted that it was over. The end had come, and death had spoken. “It is finished,” must have sounded like the vision was dead.

So, we ask ourselves. Where has our sight been obscured? Where in your life are you unable to see beyond the pain? Deep in your bones, you want to believe that you will emerge from this brokenness. We have felt the shattering of what we had wanted and sometimes even achieved.

Nick:

Think of Judas, the one who couldn't see beyond his way, or even beyond his own betrayal. His guilt that would have been absolutely absolved in the risen Christ, couldn't wait. He lost hope in God, he cast instead his lots in with the powers and principalities of the world. His shadow must have felt like it would never end.

Where do you need to see beyond your actions? Who amongst us doesn't have regret, where we have been unable to leave behind the ache or longing for what we want? Ends come, sometimes because we feel stuck to repeat our past and sense that the light will never reappear.

Terry:

What about James? James, the one who couldn't stay awake, he must have remembered that he couldn't keep his eyes open, his focus, where he couldn't even stay awake one hour in the garden that was his last opportunity to be with his Lord. James disconnected from the one who could have safely secured his future, offering him a place and purpose in this holy world.

What drowsy distraction, or an assumption of status quo, caused you to miss the most significant last of something? You might not have known it, but now you long to have paid better attention. Now you sit, hiding behind the locked door of the upper room that no longer feels safe or secure.

Nick:

Think of Mary, carrying her remaining burial spices after anointing her savior's feet, was walking through the depths towards an expected corpse. Unable to imagine beyond the proper cleansing and wrapping; imagining holding her loss as she touches him.

Where have we longed for sacred closure, when God wasn't finished? Who among this faithful community has been unable to imagine beyond our grief? You were ready to go through the motions, missing the miracle God has yet to reveal and complete.

Nate Staniforth tells this tale of wonder that encompasses the feeling these brave women might have had when they saw the tomb, that was not a tomb. They had witnessed death, and they didn't find it. He tells this story.

One night my mom came upstairs to wake me and my younger brother. It felt like midnight, but it was probably more like only nine or ten. She held my sleeping baby sister and asked us to come downstairs. Dad had already started the car and put blankets on the back-bench seat, and we set out into the night, on an adventure, they said.

We lived in Ames, Iowa - a small, liberal college town surrounded by endless stretches of corn and soybean fields - and 1- minutes out of town on the two-lane highway we were beyond the reach of the city's light and enveloped in total darkness. The entire world was reduced to the faint illumination of the dashboard and a short smudge of yellow from the headlights on the road ahead. We pulled off the highway onto a gravel road. Dad turned off the engine and we all got out.

On either side of the road corn rose above my head and the warm summer wind breathed quietly through the stalks. I stood there, expectant, I imagine, and uncertain why we had come. And then I looked up.

This was not the sky. I had seen the sky – I knew how the sky looked at night, and this was something different entirely. The comforting veil of faint stars that mildly wrapped every other night had been replaced by a void of terrible space and time and distance, stretching infinitely away, forever. There was Mars. There was the Milky Way. There was the universe in all of its awful, overpowering majesty towering above us, inexplicably high and distant, hostile, and beckoning, dangerous, and wild, a haunted place where we were the only ghosts for miles.

Then the meteor shower began. My dad led us up a low hill and laid the blankets on the wet grass. I don't remember how long we lay there, watching the sky, but I became aware for the first time that the entire planet – the oceans, London, Mount Everest, everything – lay directly and totally behind me. Somehow the night sky had unveiled the true nature of this road, mistaken during the day as a gravel route through a cornfield but revealed now as the final patch of earth at the very edge of the world. That night the mystery of our situation felt like one grand miracle, hidden just out of sight unless you really try to see it.

That there is something rather than nothing and that we are here to be a part of it – surely this is amazing. How is this so easy to forget? How is this so easy to ignore, silence or overlook in the pursuit of other things? Even at a young age, we learn that the universe is filled with loneliness and fear, but lying there, clinging to the blanket as the earth spun and meteors fell and the whole of the existence stood on display. I recognize that whatever else it was, and whatever I became in it, the universe was also filled - to the very cusp - with wonder.

So now decades later, I worry that the experience of wonder becomes harder and harder for me to find as I get older. It has nothing to do with education - wonder is not the product of ignorance - but it does have something to do with certainty. As an adult, I am tempted to establish and reaffirm at all times the boundaries of my existence - to say, "This is my life and I have a good grip on it," like an ostrich in his own personal kingdom under the sand. But my favorite moments are the ones that shoot this certainty full of holes, that barge in unannounced and track mud all over the carpet, grab me by my shirt, drag me out into the street and say, in effect, "Wake up, you fool, and open your eyes. There is more to it than that."

Terry:

It is Easter morning, the Resurrection Sunday, God's work in the world. It is so much more than our denial with Peter,

Nick:

Than our despair with John,

Terry:

Or our doubting with Thomas,

Nick:

Or our betrayal with Judas,

Terry:

Or our fatigue with James,

Nick:

Or our loss with Mary.

Terry:

The miracle of the resurrection isn't about certainty. it is not about education. It is about wonder. "It's greater than what we ask or imagine, according to his power that is active in us," (Ephesians 3:20). The Easter story shoots holes in our certainty that this is all there is in life.

That instead, it is **life enough**.

A life that no matter what the world holds behind you, the stars and the purposes of God lay before you. That God is inviting you, us, to stretch infinitely upward and infinitely away from the shadows that chase us. Wonder is not the product of ignorance. It comes through knowledge rather than in spite of it.

Nick:

The appearance of the two men glowing in white, must have felt like the heavens opened up, spit out stars, who are now speaking to these women, calling out to them, "Why do you look for death in your living?"

People of God, the veil has been torn. It has been ripped in two, torn down and cast aside, the barrier that was between God and humanity is no more. This is the end of separation from God. God has come near. Our crucified God sits in the tomb before emerging as one as a luminous, dependable, knowable Savior, who understands and has experienced the fullness of loss and ache.

We feel that God abandons Christ on this road to Golgotha. We, too, have known the aching of the seeming absence of God. We know the perceived failures of another when the embrace is so tight, there is no air for words, in this vacuum, there is holding, bearing, suffering, and trusting.

Yet, somehow the darkened sky had unveiled the true nature of this road, mistaken during the day as a gravel path out of Jerusalem but revealed now as the final patch of earth at the very edge of the world.

Jesus walked this path and became the one who can hold us tightly, and we can hold onto, who joins us in our pain, our tears, our sorrows, that we might lay them down.

Terry:

"Look," Jesus proclaimed in Matthew's last sentences of his Gospel, "I will be with you, myself, every day until the end."

Nick:

Paul's proclamation to the Romans (8: 11) is ours, "The same power that rose Jesus from the dead lives in us."

So, Broadway, are you ready to say together our glad, "Hallelujah?"

Congregation:

"Hallelujah!"

Nick:

And Amen.

Terry:

Amen.