

The Story

You got up early this morning. You got up and you got dressed and you came to church. You came to hear good news. But you brought something with you. You came with a story. Each one of you has a story. You have stories of heartbreak and suffering. You have stories of grief and loss. You have stories of struggle and courage and perseverance. You have stories of commitment and constancy. You have stories of love and loyalty. You have stories of hope and promise.

As your pastor, I'm truly blessed to be among you and to stand before you this morning. And there's no more appropriate time than this Day of days to tell you so. It's been a privilege to hear some of your individual stories, And I'm humbled by your trust.

Your church has a story, too—a story of individual believers that, over time, have become a faith community. Have become a close-knit and loving family.

However, in addition to all of these stories, there's another story. It's a story that had its beginnings way, way back in the long ago, before the world was made. But as this story unfolded, all of its earlier chapters were but a prologue to the account that you just

heard. In this event, the story culminates. In this event is deep, deep mystery. We're not told how it happens. We don't know. But we know all that we need to know.

For according to Luke, that master storyteller, at the crack of dawn on the first day of the week, very early in the morning of the day we call Sunday, Mary Magdalene and a handful of other women arrive at a tomb. Now Luke's already told us that the One whose tomb the women visit is the very One whose death they have witnessed. The One they have seen laid in the tomb. Now they come with burial spices and ointments. Come to anoint his body.

And what they see and what they hear in this place will stay with them always. And will stay with you and me as well.

The women see a ponderous stone that no longer seals the tomb's entrance. They see that the tomb is empty. They see two radiant beings. And hear them announce stupendous news: *The One you seek is not here, but has risen.* The women hear a reminder: *He told you that he would be crucified and be raised on the third day.* Then Mary and the others remember his words. They look at one another. And they leave that place. They go and tell. They're the first ones ever to go and tell. They're the first to proclaim the resurrection.

But for the eleven—still fearful, still hiding—for the eleven who hear this first Easter sermon, it's nonsense. It's an idle tale! A made-up story. They don't believe it. It seems, to them, outside the realm of possibility.

Twenty centuries later, there are many in our post-modern world for whom this story *still* seems outside the realm of possibility. For citizens of a scientific, secular age, this story lies beyond the parameters of what they've been conditioned to believe is possible. This story is outside the boundaries of experience for human creatures who've gotten used to being in a world that both proclaims and deals death. This story is outside the boundaries of experience for people who've grown accustomed to looking for the living among the dead. This story is outside the boundaries of experience for those who think that the only place where Jesus Christ can be found is in a cemetery. Or—perhaps—in the dusty pages of a rarely-opened book.

This book that tells a story. A story that focuses on and centers around and finds its reason for being in *one day*.

The psalmist sings that *this* is the day which the Lord has made! A better translation of the Hebrew words would be that this

is the day on which the Lord has *acted*. This is the day on which the Lord has acted *definitively*.

We know this because we have the testimony of four gospel writers that on a particular day two thousand years ago, our God entered into human history. We have the testimony of four gospel writers and the Apostle Paul that on a particular day in history, this God of almighty power and measureless grace took the lifeless body of Jesus and raised him from the dead.

And we know this because—even though on that day of resurrection the apostles deem it an idle tale—they *do* come to believe. So deeply, so passionately do they come to believe that they stake their very lives on the truth of this story. They witness with their lives to the truth of this story.

Those first disciples come to believe because they have an encounter with the One that the grave could not hold. Because you and I also have had an encounter with this One that the grave could not hold, you and I also have come to believe.

The truth of this story is revealed in every one of you. You yourselves are the living proof of his resurrection!

And the truth of this story is that because Jesus *has* been raised from the dead and his body has been transformed, so too,

you and I who belong to him will be raised and *our* bodies will be transformed.

The truth of this story is *already* transforming you and me. We are a people formed by a story. Shaped by a story. This story is *our* story: the story into which each of our personal stories is enfolded. Like the life we're living in this story—the new life we're living *now, today*, in this story—the story has no ending.

The truth of this story means that when we're parted from the ones we love—the dear ones we no longer see and touch—we can be confident that the separation is only temporary. We have the assurance that these whom we love are alive in God. And that we will once again be with our grandparents and our parents and our siblings and our spouses and our sons and our daughters—all because of the truth of this story.

And the truth of this story means that when our faith becomes sight—not *if* it becomes sight but *when* it becomes sight—we too will be in the presence of this God who still today is bringing life out of death.

The truth of this story is a wondrous truth that some have never heard. The truth of this story is a truth that some desperately *need* to hear.

So go! Go and tell the story—just like those women did on that first day of the week. Even if your hearers consider it an idle tale, tell the story and leave the rest to God. What matters is that you go and tell the story. Because this story is a part of you. And you are a part of this story.

The truth of this story is the truth of Easter! We're Easter people—and ours is a resurrection faith! For the resurrection of Jesus the Christ is no idle tale. It's gospel truth! It's good news! It's the overarching reality of your life and mine. It's the story of stories.

And because of the truth of this story, beloved, we have the sure and certain hope of life beyond what we call death. For we serve a risen Savior who is the promise of our deliverance from sin and death. We serve a risen Savior who defeats and *conquers* death.

Where, O death, is your victory! Where, O death, is your sting?

Death has been swallowed up in victory! Christ the Lord is risen today! Everlasting joy is ours, for he lives! And he reigns in glory—for ever and ever.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.