

RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD – March 27, 2016
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Duluth, MN
Acts 10:34-43; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26; John 20:1-18

All resurrection stories begin in the dark. Last night at the Easter Vigil, we told the ancient stories again that in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, *darkness* covered the face of the deep before God said let there be light. The precursor of Israel's deliverance from Egypt was the dark oppression of slavery. And it was in the *dark belly of the whale* where a contrite Jonah prayed and was saved, to receive and offer others a second chance. These and other OT stories all point to and have their fulfillment in the resurrection of our Lord, which they help reinterpret as God's new creation, new deliverance, ultimate salvation once and for all. Yet they all begin *in the dark*. So it's not surprising we read *it was still dark* when Mary came to the tomb. It's not surprising to read that, for the chaos in the city and that horrible day of death still lingered. It's not surprising, for we have been there ourselves.

Standing in the dark in a place of tragedy, finding it not like we had expected. Shocked, horrified, full of grief. Mary came to offer devotion to her Lord, to pray, to help, but seeing no stone she had to tell someone of a *new chaotic concern*: "They've taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where he is." Notice she doesn't mention God acting yet, just some "they" - and "we don't know." The basic framework of our conversations at sixth avenue and third street another dark morning watching firefighters, or of dialogue in a hospital room waiting for results, or of journalists in Brussels this week. Mary speaks for many when tragedy, sorrow, or uncertainty overcome us, when it is difficult to even say *where God is* in it all, and suddenly we too can feel at the mercy of powers beyond our control, and all we can do is weep.

Earlier this month, I received a letter from a close friend. "I didn't think when I was young that the primary obstacles in my life up to this point would be related to grief," he wrote. "I didn't anticipate that the hardest challenges I would face and overcome would be about *grieving futures no longer possible, grieving pasts I wish I had spent differently, or grieving the impacts of misfortune outside of my control*. Like everyone else, I yearn for a degree of security, certainty, familiarity, and dependability and my own sense of those things is greatly affected by space and place. When I saw the fire, I was so sorry for your loss of security, certainty, familiarity, and dependability that your church building gave to everyone." He went on to talk of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross' stages of grief that end in acceptance. "I've grieved enough loss to know it's not enough to 'accept' it. Accepting loss does not fill the void it leaves behind. *I now believe that in order to move forward from loss, the void must be filled with the growth of something new.*"

Here is why Easter doesn't stop with the empty tomb but is about encountering the risen Lord. Here is why Gloria Dei was so blessed those first

days, that we were greeted in tragedy not by an empty building but by a living congregation. Here is what Faith and we together have been discovering these past weeks, that *the risen body of Christ is real* in the inseparable bonds of the church here and across the world, that this is not the end but the growth of something new, and that our ministry lives by resurrection faith.

That same friend told of a pastor working in a recovery ward for people who suffered traumatic brain and other physical injuries. He said that in order for patients to work through their grief, *they had to replace the futures they previously envisioned for themselves*. His role and the role of their loved ones was helping them dream again. Helping them *dream new dreams for futures now possible*, helping them find joy in the present, helping them begin to see the good in things again and express gratitude.

Mary came to realize that when she knew he couldn't hold on to the past or even her previous concept of Jesus, and how it was only when he *called her name* that she recognized him. This week in bible study, we were talking about how sometimes in life *we might not recognize God's presence right away*, but only later look back and say, "That was God." Like Mary, or like Peter who got to the tomb first and even went in, yet whose faith emerges later when the risen Lord encounters him with forgiveness. But the 3rd figure of this Easter passage, the *Beloved Disciple*, is different. Friday, unlike Peter, he stayed near the cross; now he's running with Peter to find out what happened. But what's significant about him is, even though they didn't understand everything, *the Beloved Disciple "saw and believed."* We know people like this today; in fact every church needs them. They are those who see not just what's there, but *what's not there...yet*. They see gifts to encourage in children who aren't yet grown up, they see potential in starting a free neighborhood breakfast or a community garden or food shelf without many resources just because there are hungry people; they see the possibility of a viable ministry even in the midst of uncertainty. And in building new relationships and adapting to new spaces, Beloved disciples among us continue to *see and believe*, trusting God is at work, pointing to resurrection faith and God's power to bring new life.

Last week we received this stuffed bear from some Beloved disciples in Lorain, Ohio. The sanctuary of First Lutheran Church there was destroyed by fire in late August 2014. They too gathered for worship, they too held their monthly food program like always, they too experienced love and support from near and far. "Hope" the bear had arrived there from Trinity Lutheran Church in New London WI, which had its building destroyed by a tornado. Hope has been with us every Sunday, they wrote. Since 2005, in fact, Hope has been with Lutheran churches in Missouri, Kansas and Michigan, all of which have experienced loss. "We thought we might keep Hope with us until our new building is finished, but then we learned about the fire at Gloria Dei in Duluth MN. The images of the disaster on the Internet were eerily familiar to us and even the church location. We were on 6th Street, 6 blocks from Lake Erie, and Gloria Dei is on 6th Avenue, 6

blocks from Lake Superior. On March 13, 2016 we approved the plans for our new building and bid farewell to the bear, sending it with our prayers for them and *for all who need hope.*”

The living body of Christ is real, pictured on the back of their card and those of other churches. Like all resurrection stories, their stories begin in the dark. They plumb the depths of grief but know they can’t stay in the tomb. And neither can we. *What will be our future, our Easter witness?* We do not grieve as those who have no hope, Paul reminds us. Christ meets us where we are, calls us by name, and equips us to be people of the resurrection. We are not alone in life or death; we belong to Christ crucified and risen, and are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, to help one another dream again, to see and believe, to participate with God in love for this world, trusting that the renewal of all things has begun. Amen.

D. Carlson 3.27.16