



ST. MICHAEL'S SERMONS

Greenville, SC

The Resurrection of our Lord

Easter – April 16, 2006

John 20:1-18

THE STORY

What will you “hand on as of first importance” to those who come after you? What are you already “handing on as of first importance” to those who come after you? What in the world – what event; what truth; what reality; – is big enough, exciting enough, energetic enough to make you run? Run! Not once but twice. Run to see! Run to tell others! Run as Mary Magdalene and Peter and John run in this Easter Gospel! It is – after all – “early in the morning,” and I doubt all three of them were “morning people.” It is quite remarkable, highly significant, even if you are a “morning person.”

What is big enough to make you run? What is important enough for you to hand on to others? Paul writes: “I hand on to you as of first importance what I in turn received ...” and he tells the story! The story of Christ's death. The story of Christ's resurrection. The story of Christ's appearing as the Crucified and Risen Lord of all.

Mary Magdalene and Peter and John run and discover the story. They see, they believe, they encounter the Crucified and Risen Lord of all. It is the story which causes them to run! Mary Magdalene walks to the tomb, and then, seeing the stone removed she runs to Peter and John – who then run back to see. It is the story which causes them to run! The story captures them. The story converts them. The story congregates them. The story commissions them. It is the story which is big enough – exciting enough – energetic enough – to do all this!

Story is NOT false. Story is true!

You and I hear the word “story” and we immediately assume the word “fiction.” Fabrication. Something made up. Perhaps even a lie.... My mother taught me not to “tell stories.” Your mother probably taught you the same thing. Some of you may watch “The Stories” on afternoon television. Some of you may enjoy reading “fiction” or listening to “fiction” on books on tape or Radio Reader. Some of you may enjoy movies – which are made, and, therefore, often made-up. The labels themselves – “stories,” “fiction,” “made-up,” “made for TV” – point to the falsehood and the fabrication. But the enjoyment we find in them, the magnetic power they have over us, point to their truth, their real-ness, their reality. Stories resonate with us. Something within us resonates with them – because each and every one of us has a story! Because each and every one of us in a certain sense is a story. Because our story defines us – helps us know who we are and whose we are and why we are and what it means that we are!

Our cats and dogs have stories, but they cannot tell them. We have stories and we can tell them! We can tell them to our selves and to others. It is what defines us. It is what makes us human. We see this most clearly – and most painfully – in diseases of dementia or traumatic injury leading to amnesia or removing the ability to speak or write ... so that the stories can no longer be told.

Story is not false! Story is true! And real! And genuine! And story makes us genuine, and real, and true.

God has a story too. God's story tells us God loves us so very much that God creates us for God's Own Self; that God sends His son to save us from our own selves; that God stands beside us and walks with us to help us become what He has made us to be. It's the three articles of the Apostles' Creed, if you want to look it up. The essence of God's story, deeply distilled, decidedly definitive for us, is this Easter Gospel! It is **the** story. Not only the story which captures Mary Magdalene and Peter and John and compels the action and creates the community and causes the encounter in this morning's Gospel text. Not only the story which captures and converts Paul so that he changes his life and becomes the first Christian theologian and is compelled to hand on to you and to me the same story! It is **the story**. The story of all time The story for all time and for all people and for you and for me and for us! The story for all our stories and for your story and for my story.

There are many and various stories woven together within the Gospel story we just read: Mary Magdalene and Peter and John are each in a different place when the reading is ended ... one is uncertain, one sees and believes, and one encounters and understands! Each is in a different place when the reading is ended. But the story goes on. The story goes on and takes them along! And there is ample room in the story for each of their stories and for each of our stories. The story is that big, that real, that alive and that powerful. There are many and various stories woven together within this congregation. There are many and various stories woven together within the story of your life and the story of my life. But this story, this resurrection story, God's story, is big enough and real enough and alive enough and powerful enough to capture us all, to convert us all, to congregate us all, to commission us all! To change us – so that we become Easter people. To change us – so that we encounter again and again along life's way the Risen Lord of all who once was dead and now is alive and calls us by name! To change us – so that we become what God has made us to be: the Kingdom of God in this place.

Our Young Youth during their Lenten journey studied the story: they read it, they heard it, they watched it on video, they felt it as they rang handbells for worship and the bells vibrated in their hands and in their hearts, they touched it as they designed and created this Easter banner hanging behind me. They involved all five senses because they also always had refreshments. The story captured all of them. And now they tell it. This story. They hand it along. It has become their story . . . and it is changing them. When they tell you ten years from now how it has changed them, I hope you will come and tell me!

My relationship with my father seemed to center around water: he taught me to fish, he taught me to swim, he taught me small boats, he taught me to navigate, he taught me water safety and seamanship. He and my mother brought me to be Baptized. And at my ordination he placed in my hands the Holy Scriptures – my mother's mother's Bible. The night my father died, his children sat with him. It was very early in the morning. The sun was not yet up. My hand was resting on his shoulder. And there in that Cardiac Care Unit one drop of water fell from the ventilator tube onto my hand. Right there. And right there God's story changed my story and it was Easter all over again!

What are you handing on as of first importance to those who come after you? What in the world is big enough to make you run to tell? In a few minutes we will eat and drink the story. Then we will go out to tell and live the story. But now, now we join in singing the story – so that the story, God's story, can change our story!

AMEN