

Easter Sunday
March 31, 2024

Let us pray.

O God of Love, O God of Truth;

Let us say strong things gently and gentle things strongly.

Let us speak the truth in love to all
and love the truth that lives in each.

Let us hear the truth as we each need it and live that truth.

O God, we heed it through Jesus; Your Word & our Lord.

Amen.

Go Tell

(Witnessing To The Resurrection)

Matthew 28:1-10

"...As the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb. Suddenly there was a great earthquake and an angel of the Lord descended and rolled back the stone and was sitting on it with an appearance white like snow. The guards (which the authorities put there to guard the tomb from tampering) were filled with fear and stunned like dead men. But the angel said to the women, 'Don't be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He isn't here. He's been raised. Come see the place where he lay, then go tell his disciples he's been raised from the dead. He will be going ahead to meet you all in Galilee. So they left the tomb, fearful but also joyfully excited, and ran to tell the disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greeting! And they came to him, and kneeling, held his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said, 'Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee and there they will see me.'"

Why is it that things like *Alexa* and *Siri*
and many other A.I. devices - use female voices?
An overwhelming number of studies
has suggested that most prefer a female voice.
They seem more trustworthy, less threatening.
From a practical side,
they tend to articulate words better.
From a psychological side,
folks seem more comfortable
having them inside their living spaces,
or taking directions from them in automobiles.

Some hypothesize that this comfort stems
from being spoken to by our mothers
while in the womb!

Who knows?

But with all that, it should shock us
that back in the time of Jesus
women weren't even allowed to be legal witnesses.
According to Roman and Jewish law,
a woman's perspective on a crime or event
was considered "inadmissible".
They were considered of lesser intellect
and too emotional to give accurate witness in court.

Patriarchy had such a strangle-hold on ancient societies that the voices of women were silenced.

And still, to this very day, parts of Christianity, Judaism and Islam, are so patriarchal that women are 2nd class citizens.

But, dear friends, enter the Gospel stories of Easter!

I know we've heard these stories so many times and blanketed with such sweet tradition, distracted by chocolate bunnies, colorful eggs, crisp new clothes and delicious dinners - that the Easter story itself becomes part of the background rather than the main event.

But the way these stories were written is a big deal!

All 4 Gospels basically follow the same formula.

And that formula is mapped out precisely,

by ancient laws of what it means to be a legal witness:

1. A legal witness must see the event with their own eyes and hear it with their own ears.
2. There must always be two witnesses to be legal.
Every single eye-witness must be corroborated by someone else.
3. No witness can recant their testimony.
4. And, in the case of life and death,

if a witness is found lying,
they themselves shall receive that death sentence.

Friends, those Easter stories are begging us
to see them in a new way.

They beg us to see women as holy and legal witnesses
of the most foundational and monumental event
in the world - the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

The story in Matthew's Gospel couldn't be clearer.
Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, qualify as
2 eye-witnesses who corroborate each other.

The fear they feel is, in part,
because this is a life & death matter
and any lying could doom them.

And to the women, Matthew's story
says it once- says it twice - says it three times,
"GO TELL".

What does any of this matter?

What it says to us is that the feminine witness
is key to understanding the Risen Lord
and unlocking the mystery of the resurrection.

Now, by "feminine"

I don't mean that Christianity is a female-only faith,

just as it is not - as some make it - a male-only faith.
There are many males who have a deep appreciation
for the “feminine” witness - vulnerability, humility,
tenacious compassion, loving community,
sacred mystery -

all traits of Jesus, himself.

And there are many females who lack these traits.

Some modern politicians are good examples!

Right now, our culture, on television, in politics, in sports
and music, often serves up warped versions
of what is masculine and feminine.

And it has thrust our nation - and our world -
into the predicament we're in.

Richard Rohr, in his great book on male spirituality
declares: *Masculinity is not the same as patriarchy...*

*The (bible says) the Image of God is both male & female.
Being a whole human being means embracing
both the masculine and the feminine.*

He concludes by quoting Galatians:

*“In Christ there is no male or female, no slave or master,
no Jew or Greek - In Christ we are made one.”*

This friends,
is the main lesson of the Gospel Easter stories.

And I want to conclude with a Easter miracle story that validates the Gospels.

This actually happened 15 yrs ago, while on a Confirmation trip to Cleveland, Ohio, where we always took the teen-agers to visit the headquarters of The United Church of Christ.

But it wasn't at the headquarters, that this story happened. It happened at a men's homeless shelter in W. Cleveland, named St. Hermans, which was run by the Orthodox Church.

For years we'd visited this homeless shelter and became dear friends with them bringing them a huge load of supplies, and helping cook, serve, eat and clean up dinner for the men who lived there.

It was always something our Confirmands had never experienced before.

That year, we were a group of 9; 7 teenagers and 2 adults: Jane Lobrutto and I.

Among our group was a thin little 13 yr. old girl whom, for the sake of my story, I shall name "Alice". Alice had been adopted from an orphanage

at the age of 6,
where she had been woefully neglected.
But in her new home
she showed a determination and sweetness
that charmed people wherever she went.

Alas, her neglect had left her far behind in schooling
especially in reading.
Even after years of American education,
whenever we had to read in public
it was an arduous task as she plodded her way through
with much bravery, and much help by others.
We as a group had lovingly learned the patience
required every time Alice read.

Those 15 years ago,
we our Cleveland trip was timed with school vacation,
which was the week after Easter.
But when we arrived at St. Herman's
we walked directly into what was clearly
an Orthodox Easter Service in progress.

We'd forgotten that Orthodox Christianity
celebrates Easter a week later than our's.
And, when we entered the shelter,
we were greeted by an exceedingly different Easter
than anything we were used to.

The room was filled with incense and icons.
The service was being led by a long bearded archbishop,
dressed all in black and towering over everyone
from wearing a tall black klobuk.

He was adorned in thick gold chains
& a heavy gold cross.
Surrounding him were tall gold staffs
mounted by more gold crosses and Greek letters.

When we came in - the bishop was chanting
in a booming bass voice and mostly in Greek.
I could recognize some of the phrases and songs
but was certain this was a worship spectacle
the likes of which our kids
and most of these homeless men
had never seen before.

It must have transported them
out of their normal beleaguered lives
to somewhere splendid and transcendent.

For the first half-hour,
we'd been standing quietly against the wall,
when suddenly the Bishop announced,
“Now it's time for the parade!”

Stunned, he came over to us
and said to Alice and me, please help carry the staffs.
Obediently we picked them up
and shuffled out with the crowd,
into the ramshackled neighborhood of W. Cleveland.

Lead by the archbishop,
followed closely behind by Alice and me,
a train of about 50 worshipers snaked its way
down main streets, stopping traffic,
through dirty alley ways,
past abandoned buildings and run-downed garages.
Neighbors by the scores came out
and lined the side-walks as we paraded.
The archbishop serenaded as we went
and we, not knowing any of the words,
but being filled with this foreign spirit of Easter
hummed along.

After at least a mile-long route,
we returned to the homeless shelter
for the conclusion of the Easter service.

Back inside, and still holding the tall golden staffs,
Alice & I ended up standing right beside the archbishop.
We could tell he was concluding
when suddenly he turned to both of us

and handed us each a worship handbook
and said, “Would each of you please read a part?”

Immediately my heart was crushed.
I knew I’d be fine reading what was in front of me,
but poor Alice would be tortured by the prospect.

I have no recollection of what I read
because I was so distraught on behalf of Alice.

When I was finished my part,
the archbishop showed where she should read.
She took the book
and I looked into her eyes expecting fear,
but instead, she was filled with pride and reverence.

She opened her mouth and began,
but instead of reading - to everyone’s surprise
SHE BEGAN TO CHANT!
She chanted in English as fluidly and rhythmically
as the archbishop himself,
but with a young woman’s voice
so delicate, lovely and clear
it was as if an angel were in our midst.

And even more surprising,
she stumbled not once - paused not all.

The words came flowing out of her mouth
as if she'd been doing this for years.

I felt the tears running down my cheeks.

I looked at our Confirmation group - and they were all
crying too.

We all realized that we were witnessing a tiny miracle.

When Alice was finished,

she calmly handed the archbishop back his book.

And in English, he pronounced,

“The Lord is Risen”

To which we responded,

in a way we had never experienced before,

“He is risen indeed!”

Prayer of Pastoral Care Easter Sunday March 31, 2024

ANTHEM Acclamation – Hallelujah Praise the Lord

Psalm 118 proclaims, "This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." Ps. 118: 24

Let us pray for the church, the world, and all in need
saying, God of resurrection, **hear our prayer.**

On this Easter morning we praise you, O God, for your life in this world and for the life, death, and resurrection of your son, Jesus. In the dawn of this new day that you have made, we open ourselves to the living presence of Jesus in our lives. May we walk with him by the indwelling of your Holy Spirit.

God of resurrection, **hear our prayer**

O Holy God, you lift all things out of dust, you breath love into every cell, you call us into communion with you, and you bring victory over death. In raising Jesus from death, you invite us to know we are loved beyond the measure of our days.

God of resurrection, **hear our prayer**

As Jesus was raised up in obedience on the cross, so you accompany all who suffer and are bowed down with grief. We lift up those who have died and been deeply wounded by war: in Gaza, in Ukraine, in the chaos in Haiti, in all areas of conflict in our world. We thank you for the work of the United Nations, of governments and of all people seeking to bring safety, and healing in their distress. And we pray for the families of those killed in the bridge collapse in Baltimore this week.

God of resurrection, **hear our prayer**

Bless the exhausted and weary. Grant them renewal in their souls. We pray for all victims of hate as we work for justice for everyone, and the thriving of democracy in here at home, and around the world. With humility, we pray for the planet, our home. Heal what we have scarred and broken; renew the face of the Earth so that your creation may speak to us of your goodness.

God of resurrection, **hear our prayer**

With your compassion, O God, wipe away the tears of all who weep. Send your angels to watch over the vulnerable and sick. We lift before you those on this church's immediate needs prayer list. ...

We commend to you, gracious and ever-living God, all for whom we pray. In the name of Jesus, our risen Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

SERMON

OFFERING With compassion for our needs, the Risen Jesus stands beside us, calling our names. Let us with the same mercy, bring our tithes and offerings to relieve the suffering of the world and to show forth the good news of resurrection life.

OFFERTORY Sanctus – Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts

Holy God, you give us life itself and the power to befriend our companions in this world. Bless these gifts for the sake of those in need, in Jesus' name. Amen.

ANTHEM Agnus – Lamb of God

