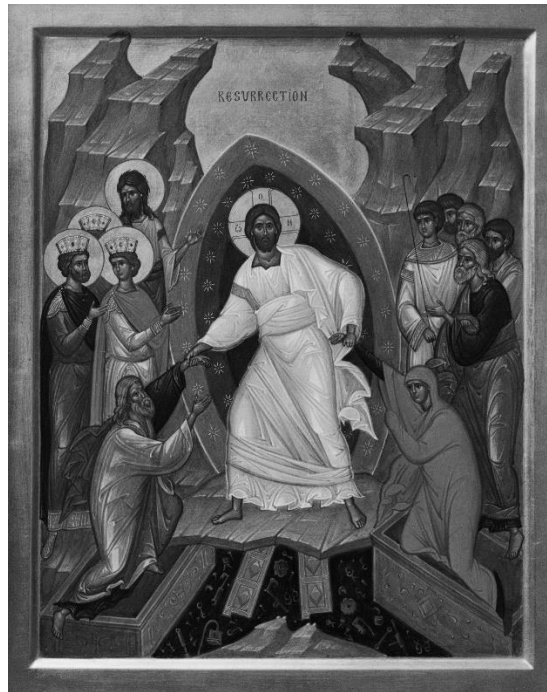




SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

THE VERY REV. STEVEN L. THOMASON, DEAN AND RECTOR
EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 1, 2018
ISAIAH 25:6-9; PSALM 118:1-2, 14-24; ACTS 10:34-43; MARK 16:1-8

ARISE AND TELL THE STORY



Happy Easter!

When my daughters were young, I would tell them bedtime stories, usually involving a pack of dogs, one of which was their childhood pet, Amy-Doodle-Dog, who along with the others would go on all sorts of adventures and escapades, narrowly escaping disaster, often getting lost, but always making

their way home in the end. They didn't know it, but I'd draw storylines from Homer and Virgil epics, from myths and fairy tales, and even from biblical stories, all translated onto the dogs, each of which had a special character—the fearless daredevil, the fretful one pleading for the others not to go down that dark alley, the sweet one simply trying to

keep them all together, the one who always managed to become lost, and required rescuing, and so forth.

Every time I finished a story, they didn't ask me what it meant; they asked me to tell it again.

We are a story-telling species—we have been since our ancestors lived in caves and developed a penchant for spoken language. Some paleontologists believe a more apt name for humans could be *Homo narrans*, rather than *Homo sapiens*. *Homo narrans*, because we are a story-telling lot, and that's what really distinguishes us from other species. And let's face it, the argument could be made, given all the violence and destruction we wreak on one another and the world, that we have not yet evolved into a full capacity for sapiential wisdom.

The art of storytelling accomplishes more than just entertainment. Real stories may or may not be true on the outside (the way we tell them), but they are always true on the inside. They lend meaning to our lives, they are how we understand our past, frame our present reality, and project understanding about what the future may hold for us.

Even at an early age, when their spirits are still unblighted by cynicism, children intuitively know this about the power of stories and their bearing on our lives. Stories

shape our identity in profound ways. A child's innate response on hearing a good story is "tell it again!"

I suspect most of us are here today, in this cathedral church, because at some level we've come to hear the story again. We are giddy at the prospect. It is a great story with rich intrigue, bewildered disciples; there's heroic death and deep despair, both of which are ultimately thwarted by supernatural action we might call a miracle.

For some, cynicism may have wedged in to undermine that yearning to hear the story told once more, and I get that. If you are there, know that you are not alone. But here's what I know: If you are looking for just the facts in this Easter story, you will likely find your Easter joy unsatisfyingly blunted. As one who straddles the fields of science and theology, I would maintain that facts lead to knowledge, while stories lead to meaning and identity, and you cannot fact-check your way into the resurrection or into a meaningful relationship with a loving God who has claimed you as beloved all along. Again, real stories may or may not be true on the outside (the way we tell them), but they are always true on the inside.

The Easter story unfurls the past in ways we can hitch a ride and make it our own, while also forging a portal between the divine world

and our own. It is an invitation to understand our story as gathered into God's eternally sublime story of creation and renewal, even while we know the imperfections and brokenness of this life. Our story does not gloss over the dark impulses of humanity.

Last week I listened once more to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s final Sunday sermon, delivered 50 years ago yesterday, at our sister cathedral in Washington, DC. That service had the largest attendance on record for the National Cathedral, with the nave packed, audio piped into a full St. Alban's Parish on the cathedral close, and two thousand more gathered on the front steps to listen. King entitled the sermon, "*Remaining Awake through the Great Revolution*," and it is well worth listening to as we pause this week to mark the anniversary of his untimely death. He is still prophetically telling our nation's story to us, and we would do well to listen.

He spoke of the racism that afflicts this nation, the violence that erupts from it, the haunts of war as it waged on in Vietnam, and of the deep divide of income inequality that is breaking the human spirit. With a few nouns and names changed, he could easily have been speaking about our present reality a half century later.

He spoke of the evil of the bootstrap philosophy—that the downtrodden must lift

themselves up by their own bootstraps; that's the way out of poverty. Anyone who is willing to try, can do it. But the reality is that our nation has institutionalized racism and income inequality to such a degree—in education, health care access, infrastructure, housing and job access—that there are no bootstraps long enough to end the disparity.

And yet King remained hopeful, even expectant that God was stirring in the great revolution unfolding still in our time. He said, "*human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of dedicated individuals who are willing to be co-workers with God.*"

And then he asks of any listening, will you join the cause, and proclaims boldly, that together "*we shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice. We shall overcome because truth, crushed to earth, will rise again.*"

Today we proclaim that, in the mysteries of God, Jesus, crushed to earth, rises again, and invites all creation into the experience of resurrection life.

We have a resurrection icon, that normally hangs in our columbarium chapel in the crypt, but we've brought it up today. A photo image is on the cover of your service leaflet.

The scene depicts a risen Jesus, adorned in brilliant white, breaking open the gates of death, and lifting Adam and Eve, representing all humanity, out of their shackled prison. No one is left to lift themselves up by their own bootstraps. Christ is there with a helping hand, and says arise, and join him in the great revolution.

On this Easter Day, when we tell the story again, you are invited to arise.

Arise, my friends, and join the cause.

Arise, and go forth together, leaving no one behind.

Arise, and follow the resurrected Christ who leads us.

Arise, and be Christ's hands and heart in this broken, hurting world.

Arise, and work along the arc of God's justice.

Arise, and lean into the future that God dreams for all of us.

Arise, and live the story here and now.

Reference

Thematic elements drawn from an essay by Nathan Kirkpatrick,
https://www.faithandleadership.com/nathan-kirkpatrick-tell-it-again?utm_source=albanweekly&utm_medium=content&utm_campaign=faithleadership



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