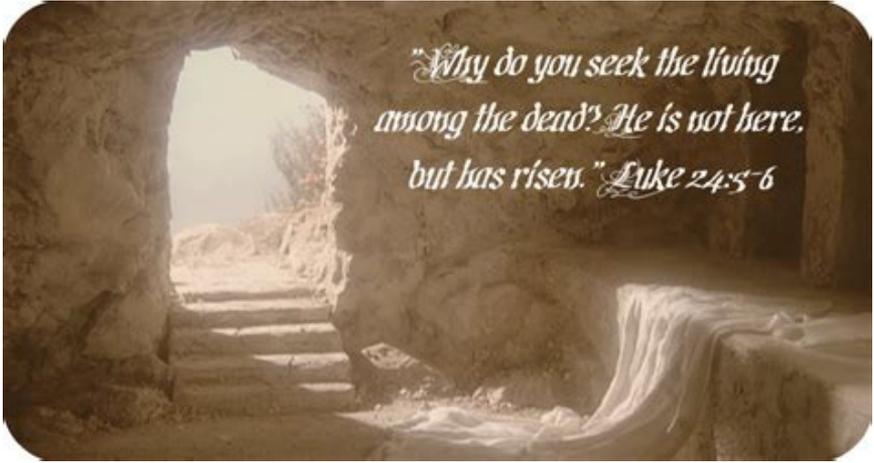


ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER
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WHAT'S YOUR STORY

The Rev. Andrew F. Kline

Text of a Sermon preached Easter Day

April 17, 2022

ACTS 10:34-43 | PSALM 118:1-2, 14-24
1 CORINTHIANS 15:19-26 | LUKE 24:1-12

As best as I can tell, my story has a limit. It will end. No big deal. Maybe some offspring of mine will make it interesting when they tell it. But as the novelist and screenwriter say, thank God it has an end. How else can you tell it? But in my case: I will be forgotten. How about you? If you have the courage and the wisdom, say it: I will be forgotten.

Jesus' story has reached its limit. It is over. True, on that first Easter morning, it is not over for those who were his friends. They, however, have been left with nothing but fear, regret, recrimination, and guilt. For an evening and a day he suffers the most cruel shame

and punishment. He dies of suffocation from dehydration and exposure. His punishment is painful. His treatment shameful. But this is not yet the story's limit.

Add: he knows it is coming. Add: his best friend betrays him. Plus his people turn against him. Plus they are led by leaders who care only for power and doubt truth. Plus he is a victim of Roman tyranny, of empire that only wants tribute, that refuses to recognize that people should be free and share the dignity of God's image.

Plus he is innocent. Plus everyone knows it. Plus public opinion chooses to release a criminal in his place, because everyone knows this is how to save themselves. Plus he is young, and all he has done is help people and seek their betterment. Even as he draws his last breath he is paying attention. Not giving up. Being there for others. Pouring out his life. Until finally, he gives up his spirit. He is buried. He will soon be forgotten.

Those first witnesses to the empty tomb know what we know. Dead men stay dead. Seeing ghosts is one thing. Seeing dead Aunt Mary sit up, eat and drink, is another. No one, especially not those first disciples of Jesus, believes that the dead rise and just stroll out the tomb. They saw Jesus raise Lazarus. But Lazarus had fallen asleep. Jesus had been murdered by the powers that be. True, he was not broken, yet surely he was obliterated.

As the sun rises, as light begins to shine on all this, in these first twelve verses of Luke's telling of this strange event, all we have is a stone rolled away, and an almost empty tomb, or more ironically, the noble women and their idle gossip and that coward Peter and his curiosity.

It's not fair that nobody will listen to the faithful women. It's not like they are allowed to testify in court! Certainly, nobody in their right mind would listen to any theory Peter might come up with. But he does notice something. The only real sign. The burial linen wrapped neatly.

Idle gossip and a coward's curiosity. Otherwise, it is clear. Jesus is dead. And somebody has stolen the body. Now why would anybody bother to unwrap the body and then take it? No matter. Nothing has changed. That's the most likely ending. That's how the story ends....

Until it doesn't.

Precisely because we live amidst the greatest abundance, wealth and explosion of knowledge in recorded history, we are experiencing an even more astonishing crisis of meaning. There are no authorities anymore. No experts we trust. No one is particularly listening to our famous atheists and materialists anymore. The word science induces nervous glances. But the real problem is that we have lost the thread. We realize we need to know the story of things, we need our myths and legends. But which one is true?

The truest things are true at all levels, body, soul, spirit, earth, air, water, sky, lower register, and upper register, seen and unseen, material and spiritual. And these days, it is so hard to put it together, that it seems like the slickest, most shameless, hucksters and salesmen, plus the rise of the strong men - to wit the stupidest - are the ones who have all our attention.

Big picture? There is a big bang. An unlikely creation out of nothing. A confluence of events billions and billions of years in the making. The emergence of a thinking, conscious species. The emergence of a families, clans, tribes and nations that slowly but gradually learn to cooperate. Hunting and gathering, plowing and reaping, herding and shepherding, chaos is ordered, and priests and artists tell the story.

There comes a fulness of time, a confluence of events, where the dignity of the individual is more important than mere freedom from slavery. And the individual can finally give meaning to the whole. In the fulness of time, under the star of David and the Sun of Rome, two Sons of God are born, and one is crucified.

The first story, of Caesar Augustus, is a maximalist tale. It is the poet in the bar, over round and round of drinks, let us therefore praise famous men, the mighty who rule the world. This story keeps repeating itself. We celebrate or mourn its sequels today.

The second story, of Jesus of Nazareth, is of a way less ambitious tale of a working man, a Jew born free because of the deliverance at the Red Sea, but of no particular class or rank, who knew the world needed not just freedom, but one more thing to be made whole.

The second story is different because, except for the occasional miracle here and there, it doesn't overreach. And here is the thing: Because of who Jesus says he is, and because of who people think Jesus might be, and because of the way Jesus dies, there are very few alternative endings. Jesus is dead. They stole the body. Jesus is alive? Maybe eventually we will figure out what this means. Still, Jesus' story has reached its limit.

May we have this morning, either the faithfulness of the women, or just the curiosity of Peter. And my God lead us further into the story, to the conclusion that changes us. The truest things are true at all levels. And if it were all lie, would Peter have kept testifying to his illusions until he was crucified upside down - just to keep the con going?

There are very very few alternative endings to this story. If there is a God, it is Jesus' story, and the love the Father has for him, that allows us to tell the story so that no one will be forgotten.

Just as Jesus' death touches and illumines every death, so does Jesus' life. And more wonderfully, because Jesus lives, our story has an end, a purpose, and a point. He is making all things new and inviting us to participate in it. He is coming back again for us. And with him, we will inherit a new heaven and a new earth. And whatever all that means, it is no pie in the sky when you die. It is the restoration of sad and broken things, of things grown old and forgotten, even here, even now.

If you are a materialist, God bless you. Happy Easter. I hope we will be friends, a glass and toast to our meaning crisis, and have a great conversation. May someone remember us!

If you believe that the universe has height and depth, and endless levels of processes and wonder, then please, bow your head, and proceed. Like those women, like dear Peter, take a step inside the tomb, and follow the story as it continues. Remember! Celebrate! Even cowards will be forgiven! Eat and drink with the risen Lord!

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!