

“Out of the Dark”

Luke 24:1-12

April 4, 2010 - Easter Sunday

I am so glad that you have come to be a part of our Easter worship. Today we celebrate the very heart of our faith. It is the conclusion of a long and difficult story. After the sorrow of suffering and death we move out of the darkness into the light and joy of a resurrection. Year after year we tell and retell the story so that it would seem that it would hardly be necessary to tell it again.

Probably, it is for that very reason that it seems as though Easter is one of the most difficult Sundays to figure out what to preach. At one point I thought that since the Easter message is so deeply ingrained in us we would not need to speak of serious matters ... But rather just celebrate. So I tried to find some light religious Easter humor to share with you. That is an interesting task. Try searching the Internet for ‘Easter humor’ some time. It doesn’t seem as though we even know how to really share the joy of this occasion. What I found was nothing light and joyfully or humorous about Easter but rather a lot of Easter bunny and Easter egg humor.

I did find one funny story that had a resurrection theme. It was about a man who was driving down the road when suddenly a colorful rabbit jumped out onto the road in front of him. The rabbit was carrying a basket of eggs. No matter how he tried, the man could not avoid hitting the bunny. He quickly stopped the car and rushed over to the rabbit but it seemed clear that there was nothing that could be done. As he stood there another car pulled up and offered to help. The man told the woman in the second car what had happened and shared his regrets that there would probably not be an Easter this year because of what had happened. The woman reached into a bag in her car and brought out a spray can. Going over to the rabbit she sprayed it liberally until suddenly the bunny sat up and then began to hop around. It gathered up the spilled contents of the basket it had been carrying and hopped down the road stopping every 50 feet or so to turn around and wave. The man said, ‘It’s a miracle - what is in that spray can?’ The woman held it out for the man to read. The label on the can said, “Hair Spray - Restores life to dead hair! Adds permanent wave.”

It is almost inappropriate. But how will we celebrate? How will we move from the darkness of death and the grave to finding to peace and joy that can be ours in a world that has been reshaped by a God that has acted to bring life out of the tombs that we often find ourselves in? Do we know that when Jesus was raised from the dead God showed us that there is no darkness that we can face that He does not have the power to bring light and new life to? Do we understand the power of this day?

There was a Sunday School teacher that asked her class of four-year-olds the question: "Does any know what today is?" A little girl held up her hand and said, "Yes, today is Palm Sunday" The teacher had been really pleased that at such a young age some one had known what was going on in the church year and she said, "That's fantastic. Now does anyone know what next Sunday is?" The same little girl held up her hand. She said, "Yes, next Sunday is Easter Sunday" Once again the teacher said "That's fantastic. Now, does anyone know what makes next Sunday Easter?" The same little girl responded and said, "It's Easter because Jesus rose from the grave" Before the teacher could congratulate her again, the little girl went on to say, "But if he sees his

shadow, he has to go back in for seven weeks."

Do we get it? Do we understand the power of the Easter message? One of the things that I saw listed the top ten reasons to celebrate Easter. Among the reasons for celebrating Easter were the following: 9. You look really, really good in yellow. 8. You just went on a low cholesterol diet and didn't want to waste all those eggs in the fridge. 7. You figure any Holiday that starts with a "Good Friday" can't be all bad. 4. You have this bunny suit you love to wear, but are too insecure to wear it without a reason. 2. You figured since Jesus went to all THAT trouble to make it to the first Easter, you'd give it a shot.

Jesus was put to death, laid in a tomb and rose to life conquering the power of sin and death. The eye witness's tell in incredible detail the unfolding events of that resurrection morning. A group of women rose early Well before first light. They prepare the spices that they would take with them for the traditional anointing of the body of Jesus that had been so ravaged in the scourging and crucifixion that had led to His death. Because of their religious laws, they had not been able to take care of all of the burial details when they had taken Him off the cross and laid Him in that rock tomb with it's bolder door. Now, in the early morning darkness they make their way to the tomb to do what they could hardly bear to think about. I don't know if the old saying about it being darkest before the dawn was true for them or not. But clearly the Bible notes that it was dark as they started out to deal with the darkest of all duties.

I suppose that there might be a lot of other details that might be more important to note but it seems to me that this is really significant. They went in the dark to the tomb. I suspect that even though they knew that the dawn would physically change that reality all that they could really envision was a continued spiritual and emotional darkness because nothing could change the facts of the Friday before.

I find myself fixating on this little detail because it seems as though this is too often where we live in the darkness not imagining that even the dawn can change the reality of the darkness in which we live. Sure - we might bring out the Easter Bunnies and hunt for a few colored eggs but do we really imagine that the dark corners of our life can be filled with light? Do we ever imagine that those hopeless situations over which we weep can in fact be touched by new life? Can the dead be raised?

I was interested to read an article this week which revealed that a recent Harris poll found that the number of American that believed in the resurrection had dropped by 10 % just since 2003. And of those surveyed only 27 % said that they believed in a resurrection of the body. Do you believe? Do you believe in the power of God? Do you know that in the power of God no darkness can stand?

One article that I read put it this way: "Mary Magdalene came to the tomb while it was still dark. But the darkness was soon overcome with light. Maybe that's the message you need to hear this day. Perhaps for whatever reason you are in darkness right now. Family concerns. Problems at work. Anxiety about your health and your future. The loss of someone you love. Easter promises us more than the {bunnies and colorful egg} in our darkness. Easter promises us that in the midst of our deepest darkness the Son rises to overwhelm the darkness forever.

Color all the eggs you want, eat as many jelly beans and chocolate bunnies as you care to. Christ is risen from the dead and we have everything to celebrate. AMEN