

“Remember, Re-orient and Roll”

(Luke 24)

[Easter Sunday]

It is a holy mystery, one that perplexes the mind, and has all the potential to stir passionate debate between ardent supporters and those who question its purpose, what it all means. So, we tend to not want to talk about it lest we find ourselves in a contentious, heated argument in the middle of our Easter ham dinner. I am talking about green plastic



Easter grass. I have no idea where using this stuff originated, although I am inclined to believe that the tinsel corporation had so much down time after the Christmas rush, and knowing that by spring we'd **finally** be vacuuming the last of the shiny static-laden strips of tinsel from our carpets that they created this green translucent version that has the power to last until we bring our tree up from the basement and the cycle is repeated. I remember growing up having clumps of grass from Easters past congregated at the very bottom of my basket

and how no matter how much I pushed down the new grass which sat on top, the two were like oil and water and would not mingle or mix.

The truth is Easter arrives with so many symbols associated with this day it can be a bit overwhelming. We see this the moment we walk in any store and start wandering around the displays, it is like a trip down memory lane, awaking nostalgia. I see the thin square box of egg dye and I instantly remember the dark blue stains that were still visible on my finger tips from coloring eggs for days afterward. I see solid chocolate bunnies and recall that I spent the afternoon gnawing on bunny ears until my stomach did summersaults. I see the packages of plastic eggs in primary colors and I remember how my brother and I would toss those eggs around the living room playing a version of hot potato, until my mother came in and told us that this was the reason we could not have anything nice. And I remember the smell of ham and green bean casserole wafting from our kitchen as I set the table with the good china and carefully placed on each plate a dyed egg with the name of a family member written in wax crayon telling them where they would sit.

There are countless memories we carry with us on this sacred day. And those memories come to our mind when we encounter one of the many symbols that surround us this time of year. So the reality is that it can be difficult to decipher what we are to hold onto on Easter day. For interwoven with the decorations and family traditions, we come into the sanctuary this morning with symbol sensory overload and immediately we encounter the smell of lilies, the reverberation of brass as we sing hymns, a cross draped in white, and an indescribable sense of hope and joy that cause a smile to cross our face. We smile because of the familiarity and comfort and because **being here** too awakens memories, which is good because remembering is what happened on the very first Easter morn. In fact, remembering is a sacred act anytime we recall someone we love who has passed from this life into the next and those memories spring forth when we see a photograph or can almost hear the person's voice roaming around the back of our minds. Now Luke is silent about the conversation that takes place between the women as they walked to the tomb on the first Easter. But, friends, we've been there. The car ride over to the funeral home or church

before the memorial service. Those moments when the grief we carry seems too heavy to sit upon the fragile air waves around us and the sound of sighs too deep for human words is occasionally interrupted with stories that practically fall off the tips of our tongues. Luke is silent on who caught the first glimpse that something didn't look right as the tomb came into sight or who first proclaimed, 'Look, the stone is no longer there.' Luke is silent about the adrenalin that must have coursed through their bodies as they ran to the entrance of the tomb. What we know is the women stepped inside, the sound of their breathing echoed off the cold, stone walls, and Luke says they were "perplexed." ***Do you think?*** On the first Easter morning there was more confusion than certainty, more a feeling of life being in the throngs of chaos than calmly singing "Christ the Lord is Risen Today", more mystery than being able to state simply in a sermon of three points or less what Easter means.

As the women tried to take it all in; suddenly two men showed up with an appearance so bright you had to avert your eyes. Now like the shepherds on the first Christmas Eve night, the women were afraid, terrified, and fell to the ground with hands trembling. As they tried to get their wits about them, the two men invited the women to remember. Remember Jesus' words. Remember Jesus' teaching and preaching. Remember his healing and love. Remember his promise that brokenness is never the last word from God. At that moment, the sound of Jesus' voice seemed to be coming from deep within, the women remember.

And today we stand alongside in an empty tomb remembering the parables and wisdom and love Jesus continues to share with us. But Luke doesn't allow us to linger too long for we are quickly told, that like the shepherds on Christmas Eve night after angels sang to them, the women ran. They ran back to tell the eleven and all those they met along the way who knew and loved and were loved by Jesus, that he was alive. I wonder when they finally slowed down, caught their breath, as they heard these words spilling from their mouth about an empty tomb and divinely appearing messengers out of thin air, what did they make of the "you gotta be kidding me" smirks that greeted them. With all apologies to Luke's more pastorally sensitive phrase "idle tale," the truth is that people very likely rolled their eyes and stifled laughs. Again, like the shepherd's words on Christmas Eve about a baby born in a manger, it was difficult for those who first heard about the empty tomb to wrap their minds around what was being said. Luke bookends his gospel with shepherds at the beginning and women at the tomb, neither of whom were respected leaders in any sense of the word in Jesus' time being the first to proclaim the truth. And let's face it when we hear an "idle tale" today from people whose clothing is a bit tattered or appearance is at all questionable, our response can be less than gracious. But Peter, when he heard, had to see from himself, ran, glanced in and saw not divine messengers but empty, hastily strewn aside linen cloths.

On the very first Easter, those who followed Jesus not only remember him, but felt as though their world was turned upside down, inside out, and their whole lives were re-orientated. Easter disrupted, even disturbed, the disciples. Friends, Easter still has the power to disorient us today if we challenge ourselves to go deeper than only sharing memories about the past. You see, when Easter is only about looking backwards, trying to recapture yesterday or going through the motions of what we've always done, we can still turn the powerful truth into an idle tale that does not impact us. The powerful truth that we worship a living God of love, that brokenness is not the last word, and that out of chaos God is still creating and inviting us into relationship. The question is do we on Easter linger at the tomb or do we run and tell others? Do we run out of church today ready to proclaim to whoever we bump up against this wondrous feeling surging within us? Do we find ways to

share the warmth of God's love that is so evident here, risking someone rolling their eyes or saying the powerful truth of new life and unconditional love is an "idle tale"?

Easter begins with remembering but moves us quickly toward a response with all our hearts, all our minds, and with all our life. This re-orientation of our lives doesn't mean we ignore the realities of empty tombs that are still around us. We need to question why people suffer, even as we reach out with what we can to the people of Haiti and Chile and to our neighbors. We listen to those who have lost a job, struggle to make ends meet. We do more than look with compassion upon children who are hungry, we make them breakfast. We realize there are others who need a meal and challenge ourselves to respond with our love. We hold a hand of someone we care about facing cancer. We don't ignore the places of pain; rather we try to seek to be steeped in the sacred even when the sacred seems so distant.

To be steeped in the sacred is to be open to God's presence that stirs and swirls in places and at times that we cannot always control and sometimes are downright inconvenient. But this should not surprise us for throughout scripture God keeps showing up in the most usual ways: to Abraham and Sarah a childless couple late in life with the promise of a child; in a burning bush to a man named Moses with a bit of a stutter; to a young Jeremiah who wonders who is going to listen to him; on a mountain top to Elijah not in wind or shouting but in the sheer sound of silence; a baby wrapped in strips of cloth laying in a manger in a back room found in an out of the way village; to unknown fishermen called to be disciples; to a man named Saul who does a complete about face on his beliefs and gets his name changed to Paul; and now add to that list today an empty tomb. God shows up and surprises us, in both serendipitous and sometimes frustrating ways.

Easter re-orientes our lives toward a world where empty tombs, confusion, sharing good news, laughter, joy, tears, ups and downs, twists and turns all co-exist, sometimes in the span of a single day. Easter re-orientes our lives toward a world where new life can even be found in the most unlikely and sometimes uncomfortable places. Easter re-orientes us toward a life-giving and life changing relationship with the living God. So this Easter may you remember more than tales from Easter's long ago, remember when God's love was so tangible, so real that you felt the sacred stirring and surging until those tiny hairs on your arms stood on end. May you remember that you are claimed and loved by God. On the first Easter, the stone was rolled away and has never stopped moving since then. The stone that sealed the tomb still has momentum leaving a faithful trail in its wake that an Easter people travel. We are an Easter people. A people called to share in real ways the good news of unconditional love and unceasing grace. We are an Easter people. A people called to remember God's activity and guided by God's activity today. We are an Easter people, a people who sing and pray and seek to respond faithfully to the holy mystery of an empty tomb and risen Lord that makes all the difference in our lives, in our faith, and in our world.

May God bless you with a remembering, re-oriented, and rolling faith for today and for a thousand tomorrows to come. Thanks be to God for the truth that Christ is risen, he is risen today. And all the people with enthusiasm said, "Alleluia". Amen.