

Easter Sermon - April 24, 2011 - Fr. Hugh. - St. George Episcopal Church
John, Chapter 20

A man was volunteering at the front desk at the Hospital...He answered the phone.

A woman's voice said, "I'd like some information on a patient. But I don't just want to hear that she's stable, or getting better, or getting worse. I want a complete report - everything from A-Z.

The volunteer said, "Well I'm not supposed to give out all that information, but I don't see what harm it could do. What's the patient's name?"

"Mrs. Sarah Brown - room 602."

"Let me see. Brown, Brown. Ah. Here it is. Oh yes. Mrs. Brown is doing very well. She's had two full meals. Her blood pressure is fine now. Her bloodwork came back normal. The heart monitor is recording a regular rhythm. And if she continues to improve, Dr. Smith will be sending her home at four o'clock this afternoon."

"Oh that's wonderful. She's being released this afternoon. Oh that is fantastic news. Thank you so much."

The volunteer said,

"Well, judging by your enthusiasm you must be a close friend or family member."

"Oh no, dear. I'm Sarah Brown in room 602. That Dr. Smith, my doctor never tells me anything."

A billion is a number we hear a lot. It is a difficult number to get your mind around.

Think about this though...A billion hours ago there were no human beings on earth.

A billion seconds ago, it was 1967.

A billion dollars was seven hours and twenty minutes ago at the rate Washington spends.

And a billion minutes ago, Jesus Christ rose from the grave.

What an absolutely exquisite irony. Who would have imagined that the greatest news the world has ever heard, would have come out of a graveyard?

God built a visible reminder of the power of resurrection into nature – that every year we celebrate Christ's resurrection in spring; and all around us plants that looked dead all winter are breaking out with beautiful fresh flowers.

Easter is truly beautiful and we who believe are Easter people.

I'm sure you've noticed that every year on Television there is a rehashing of the assassination of President Kennedy. There is always a remarkable diversity in the various eyewitness accounts.

There is a discrepancy over the number of shots fired, and the exact locations that they were fired from.

There is continued disagreement over how many people were involved in the plot - who was guilty and who was not.

We have all experienced the phenomena of reacting differently to the same event. Even in the life of a parish church there is a remarkable diversity in how people tell the same story. In church circles we call that gossip. As children we used to call it 'Chinese whispers.'

On that first Easter day there was an extraordinary burst of life-giving power when Jesus, who had been killed just a couple of days earlier, broke out of the tomb.

In the gospel we just read this morning, John tells us of a number of different reactions to this empty tomb. The people saw the same thing, of course, but they each perceived it differently.

First, we have Mary Magdalene who went to the tomb. She went there with spices and herbs to complete the burial preparations. She saw the stone had been rolled away and she assumed, quite logically, that the body had been stolen.

She did not see beyond the open grave to the possibility of the resurrection. Why?

- Because it was unthinkable.

It was not exactly unprecedented because Jesus had shown them that He could do this by raising Lazarus from the dead.

But still Mary's grief was so overwhelming, that she could not get her mind around the alternative possibility of Jesus being resurrected. Besides, she was not looking for a miracle.

Many people miss the possibility of seeing God's work, because their mind is not open to the possibility of the miraculous.

Our human nature often overrules our potentially supernatural nature, and we are, like she was, not able to see signs and wonders.

People are quick to give you a hundred reasons why something cannot be done.

The risen Jesus even spoke to her, and even though His voice was familiar, she failed to recognize His voice, and thought it must be the gardener.

We should never let our mental outlook blind us to the possibility of the power of God. We should never let ourselves be deaf to His voice.

Then along come Peter. Peter's a bit like Joe Friday from the old TV show. "Just the facts, Ma'am; just the facts."

Peter gets to the tomb just a few seconds after John, but he's the first to dare to go in. The gospel says, "He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head."

Yes, he saw those things and he noted the facts, but he did not get the picture of what those facts were telling him. He wanted more proof.

A lot of people today think like him and always want more proof. We live in a scientific age and some people assert that science is supposed to have the answers for everything. But then too, there are a lot of people within the scientific community who honestly admit that there are just some things that defy explanation.

For some people no amount of proof is sufficient.

For some people no further proof is needed.

Like Peter, many people doubt the spirit of resurrection power, either in their own life, or in the life of someone else.

"After all I knew him back when. There's no way that he could really change. He's just putting it on."

Only a few hours after the discovery of the empty tomb, Jesus spoke to Thomas, who also wanted the facts served up cold,

"You have believed because you have seen. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

The third person there that morning was John.

It's quaintly amusing that he brags in a macho way that he was the fastest runner and he got there first. But outrunning his friend was by no stretch his greatest accomplishment.

What was great was that he saw the same facts, the same evidence, but he also saw something else the others had missed. He saw with faith and he believed.

He was the very first person to realize the truth of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Even though he did not understand it, he believed that Jesus had risen from the dead.

The writer Frank Morrison set himself the task of writing a book that he was going to entitle "the Myth of the Resurrection."

During his months of research and writing, his findings were so far from what he had expected and his life was so profoundly transformed, that he ended up giving his book the new title, "The proof of the Resurrection."

The resurrection is not just an article of faith, along with many other ideas about the faith. It is the central truth of Christianity. Without the resurrection there would be no true, viable Christianity.

The 'Jesus movement' would have died with Him, on that Friday afternoon, and He would just be a small footnote in the pages of ancient history.

But the power of the resurrection began in Jesus and has lived on with an ever expanding number of believers, billions of us, who know in our hearts that with Christ, life does not end.

We will just relocate to a perfect place;

And in the meantime, we can live this life with a joy that we could never find any other way.

Through the power of the resurrection, and through belief in Jesus Christ, we have access to eternal life. We will not die for ever, and we will see those who we love, who have gone on before us.

Jesus went to his death voluntarily.
He was executed viciously
And He rose from death victoriously.

Through the power of the resurrection Christ has replaced the grim, dark door of terminal death, with the bright, shining gate of eternal life.

British author Malcolm Muggeridge was asked,
“Are you sure that there was a resurrection?”

He replied, “I am sure that there was a resurrection. I don’t care in the least whether the stone was moved, or not moved, or what anybody saw. I am absolutely indifferent to that. But there must have been a resurrection because Christ is alive now, two thousand years later.

I believe that Jesus Christ is alive now, and that His life is still valid, so that it is possible not only to hear and to learn, but to actually experience the truths that He propounded.”

We too can all know this to be true.

We can celebrate it with joy; and we can live transformed lives in the here and now, because of the inner certainty of resurrected, eternal life.

Alleluia. Christ is risen!