

Easter Day - Year B
April 12, 2009, 9:00 AM
The Reverend Rob P. Travis

“The Castle Of My Heart”

Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; I Corinthians 15:1-11; Mark 16:1-8

“So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

It's hard to write an Easter sermon in the middle of Holy Week. During Holy Week, it seems we focus so much on the death of Jesus, rather than his Resurrection.

It's like in Mel Gibson's movie of a couple of years ago, “The Passion of the Christ.” In case you don't remember, the resurrection does happen in that movie, but it is much eclipsed by the length and the depth of the scourging and crucifixion. It is hard to write an Easter Sermon in the middle of Holy Week, just as it is hard to live an Easter Life, in the middle of a world focussed on death, destruction and fear.

The women who went to the tomb that first Easter Morning, the first Apostles, were also focussed on Jesus' death. Their full expectation was to see his dead body - “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” That is what the two Mary's and Salome, were saying to one another, as they went to anoint Jesus' corpse, in the burial traditions of their people.

This question is more important than it seems the stone was very large, and it would have prevented them from adoring Jesus in death, as they had adored him in life. The stone was placed there by others, at the command of Pontius Pilate, on the recommendation of the Priests of the Temple, who were worried that an unguarded tomb, would lead to the stealing of the body, and false claims of Jesus still being alive.

The stone was not something three women, could have moved by themselves and it was doubtful that the Roman soldiers, would be willing to help these poor, grief stricken women.

Their grief turned into amazement, and then terror when they realized what had been done for them. The stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty. No one had come to snatch Jesus' body, though there are some to this day, who claim that happened. The stone and the guards would have prevented that. The stone was rolled away, the tomb was empty, and Jesus was alive.

The women and other disciples, had been distraught. How could their Lord and master, their teacher and friend, their son and brother, have been killed so soon? It must have seemed to them, that he was destroyed, in the beginning of his ministry.

In his early thirties, with plenty of time left, to truly change the world around them. How could he have been taken so soon? But his death, destroying eternal death for us all, accomplished so much more than his continuing to live for thirty or even sixty more years, would have done. And His rising to new life again, His resurrection, allowed him to reach more people, than he could have possibly reached in the life of a mortal human being, divine or not.

The stone was a bigger question, than those women could have imagined. For now Jesus began to live in the hearts, of every man, woman and child in the world, and even in those who had not yet been born. But the question of the stone remained. Would Jesus be entombed in those hearts, or He be the source of resurrected life for all of us?

The women did not see Jesus, when they went to the tomb. What they saw, was evidence of His resurrection, that is, His absence from where they thought He would be. And that question plagues many to this day. Where is Jesus? Where is he, when our economy is dropping off a cliff, and people are losing their livelihood? Where is he when our loved ones die and leave us alone? Where is he, when we are looking for guidance, about a big decision in our lives? How can we live an Easter life, when so much of our lives points to the death, of all that we hold dear?

Austin Farrer, an English priest and theologian, of the last century, described Jesus' resurrected life so well. I want to tell you what he said ~

“Where then, in all my spreading world is Jesus Christ, the man risen and glorified? When clouds received him from our sight, into what height, what distance did he go? However far away I place him, I gain nothing by it: he fits no better beyond Orion than behind the nearest trees. His risen being is no part of our interlocked system of bodily force, whether far or near. He is nowhere in this world. He is not outside it, either, for it hasn't got an outside where he could be. Where is he then? It is useless to start from me, and to fan out and out, looking for Jesus Christ: I must start from Jesus Christ, and fan out from there until, I reach myself.... At first it may seem that we have two answers, spreading on independent planes and nowhere touching at a single point. Christ's universe of spirit, and ours of physical force. Yet thinking further we perceive that it cannot be so. For while it is indeed impossible to place heaven in the world, it is impossible not to place the world in heaven. If Christ's knowledge is spiritual, as ours is physical, then he knows us, for we are spirits too, spirits in fleshly bodies; and if he knows our spirits, he knows what our spirits know, including their bodily knowledge. He hears us speak from within our throats; he thinks our thoughts as fast as we can form them. But he feels in our fingers too, and looks through our eyes; he lives out along the lines of our

vision, and our sun, moon and stars are his. By sheer love, heaven grafts the world into itself, and roots our universe in its own heart. Jesus Christ, living Son of the living God, clothed in our nature, I cannot place you in my world, but neither can I escape from yours. I cannot reach you by many steps, but I can reach you by one, the single step of faith, which lands me in the heart of heaven. If ever I am to end with you, it is from you I must begin. Thou God seest me; and if ever I am to see across the gulf from me to you, it will be by starting with you, and seeing myself through your holy and compassionate eyes.”

Austin Farrer realized something, in poetic terms, the way we teach our children in basic ones. Because of his resurrection, Jesus exists in our hearts. And this is not a sentimental value, like when someone dies, and comforting others say she will live on in your heart and mind. That is just a memory. Jesus is an actual living being, whose spiritual existence, makes our lives full and complete. The way to live an Easter Life, is to let Christ live through you from the inside out. But in order for Jesus to live in us, as Farrer, describes, the stone in front of the tomb must be rolled away.

Our hearts can either be a tomb for Jesus, sealed by a stone put there by others, and guarded by ourselves. Or our hearts can be a home, a castle, whose door is ever open, whose stone has been rolled away which allows us to live for others, out of the endless supply of love, that Jesus brings into our hearts from his own.

This reminds me of the song I learned as a child, and sing to my children today. It goes:

*“Love is the flag flown high from the castle of my heart,
From the castle of my heart, from the castle of my heart,
Love is the flag flown high from the castle of my heart,
When the King is in residence there.”*

The song goes on through all of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which are evident in our lives, like flags, showing that Jesus, the King, is alive in our hearts. The good news, the gospel, is of Jesus’ resurrection, not his perfect life, his deep teachings, or even the wonderful miracles he performed. Those things are great, indeed, but they are merely commentary on the core of the gospel, which we heard in the teaching of Peter and Paul this morning.

The resurrection is the original gospel, without it, none of the other things would have likely survived but as a story in history. The fact is, Jesus is risen, the stone was rolled away and the tomb found empty. No longer guard the stone in your hearts, but allow it to be rolled away, and what was a tomb be revealed as a castle for our lord and King.

Then let us raise the flag over His castle by showing the love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. That his presence makes possible in our lives towards others. Let these flags fly over your lives, and show others, that your stone has been rolled away, and Jesus lives in you.

So let it fly in the sky,
Let the whole world know,
Let the whole world know,
Oh, Let the whole world know,
So let it fly in the sky,
Let the whole world know,
That the King is in residence there.

The time is ended, to live in Holy Week, the time has come, to set death, and fear behind us, and live an Easter Life. That is what we are here, at Church of the Ascension, to help you do. We want all of you to live Easter Lives, full of resurrection, displaying the fruits of the Spirit, because Jesus lives in you and the stone has been rolled away from your heart. Come every Sunday, and let us help you turn every week of your life into Easter Week.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! (the Lord is risen indeed, alleluia!)