

April 21, 2019
Vicar Jonah

Easter Sunday
Luke 24:1-12

"The Rest of the Story"

Christ is Risen!
He is Risen indeed!

One of my favorite memories of my father is the long car rides that we would often go on. He loved to drive and we would spend all of Saturday in the car, just driving around, looking for moose or deer, and listening to the radio. My father loved a station called KHJ. On Saturday, they would play the same 15 or 20 songs over and over and between each set, a man named Ken Rogers would come on the air and spend about 15 minutes telling a portion of a story. I will never forget the short musical introduction to his section of air time. The trumpet would sound and then, in that classic announcer style voice, he would proclaim: "I am Ken Rogers and it is now time for the rest of the story." He would always offer a quick recap of what had been told in the previous portion of the story, but what always drove me crazy, was the fact that the story seemed to never end. His airtime would end similar to the way that it started: "I am Ken Rogers and I hope to see you next time for the rest of the story."

I once snuck out of bed and spent my entire Saturday evening in the car with the radio on, trying to stay up all night in an attempt to hear the rest of the story, but to my dismay, I learned that his story truly had no ending. There was always more to hear. There was always the "rest of the story." It was infuriating, and so, in a spirit of frustration, I began trying to ignore Ken Rogers and attempted to imagine how the story might end. Of course, my curiosity and desire to know the truth would continually get the best of me and bring me full circle to where it all began: anxiously waiting on Ken Rogers and "the rest of the story."

In the Easter narrative, we catch many similar glimpses of waiting and of not knowing "the rest of the story." Last Sunday was Palm Sunday, and the gospel narrative reminded us of Christ's kingly entrance into Jerusalem. As Christ rode into the city, many were certain that the long awaited king had finally arrived. A king who was an excellent teacher and a leader filled with compassion and mercy. The waiting appeared to be over – for the King had arrived. Little did many of them know, they were yet to experience: "the rest of the story." We gathered again on Maundy Thursday to hear and remember Christ's act of humble service as he took on the role of a household servant by washing his disciples' feet. As he did this, Christ knew the events that were about to transpire. He knew that Judas would betray him and that Simon Peter would deny him, yet he loved and served them anyway.

On Good Friday we once again heard the passion narrative, where Jesus was arrested and handed over to Pilate and Herod. Betrayed by his own people, he was beaten, mocked, and hung on a cross. But still, in his final words, Christ's love shone brightly amidst the darkness of sin and betrayal as he cried out: "Father forgive them..." and "it is finished."

Many felt that the story was over, for Christ had died and his body wrapped and laid in a tomb. But little did they know, Christ would return for "the rest of the story."

Then, in today's gospel narrative, we read about the women who had come to visit the tomb. Surely they had been anxiously waiting for the Sabbath to pass so that they might tend to the body of their

beloved Jesus. For it seemed that Christ's journey of life was over. Yet, when they arrived, the stone at the entrance to the tomb was rolled away and Christ's body was missing. In the Greek language, the place of burial, the tomb, was referred to as the $\mu\nu\ \mu\alpha$ (mnēma). It was a place in which the dead could be kept physically present, but it was also a place of memory, of remembrance. And so, when the two men appear in dazzling clothes at the entrance to the $\mu\nu\ \mu\alpha$ (mnēma), the tomb, it is almost poetic to hear them say: "don't you remember what Christ told you? The Son of Man must be handed over to sinners and be crucified and on the third day rise again." And in that moment, at the place of $\mu\nu\ \mu\alpha$ (mnēma), of memory, the women remember. They remember how Christ promised that his death was not the end of the narrative – for he would return and fulfill "the rest of the story."

The women told the disciples and others about what had happened, but with the exception Simon Peter, people did believe them. But, why would they? They had witnessed the death of their beloved Messiah and through the lens of human experience, death appears to mark the end of life on earth. What they are forgetting is that with God, death marks both the ending of this earthly life, but also the beginning of a new life.

What we learn from the Easter narrative is that death is not the end of the story, for just as Christ rises from the dead anew, we too are promised the gift of new life after death, of life eternal with Christ the one whom came to live, die, and resurrect for our sake so that we might join him in life, death, and new life in and through his resurrection. So that we might join him in experiencing "the rest of the story."

Friends, this life is filled with struggles and challenges, with fear and uncertainty, with heartache, suffering, and betrayal, but what Christ promises is that these things are not the end of the story. Through the lens of the cross, what Martin Luther calls the theology of the cross, we learn that God is present with us amidst the trying circumstances of this life and that like Christ, we will one day overcome them. And through the theology of the cross we are reminded that Christ lived, died and was resurrected to make all things new again. In an Easter Sermon from 1530, Luther said: "Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime." Just as flowers and plants follow the cycle of death and rebirth, the children of God shall do the same.

Like the disciples, it can be so easy to let the darkness of sin, doubt, and disbelief blind us from the promises of God that are present in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ our King. But what the gospel message teaches in and through this Easter narrative is that sin and death in the grave are not the end of the story. For Christ has risen. Christ has risen indeed. Through his resurrection, we too are offered the hope of life eternal. The hope of overcoming the trials of this life, and the hope of a new life where love and joy will never end.

The Christian journey is one of death and resurrection, of dying to one's self and being raised new in the hope and life of Christ. The gospel message of Christ is that this life is not the end of our story, for God promises that no matter how difficult our suffering or pain, there is hope of new life in Christ where suffering will be no more. But the challenge for us amidst the resurrection is whether or not we will trust and accept what God through Christ offers to and for us. Will we be like the women at the tomb who trust and believe? Or, will we be like the disciples and treat God's word as an "idle tale?"

I never got to hear how the rest of Ken Roger's story ended, but I know with certainty the narrative in which God through Christ promises to each of us. For in his death and resurrection, Christ offers the hope of life eternal, hope amidst life here and now, and the promise that he makes all things new. New life with God in, through, and because of the gift of Jesus Christ is "the rest of the story."

For Christ truly is risen. He is risen indeed. Amen.