

Thankful Memorial, Chattanooga
April 8, 2023
Year A, Great Vigil of Easter
The Easter Story: Go and Tell...

Genesis 1:1-2:2 & Exodus 14:10-15:1
& Isaiah 4:2-6 & Ezekiel 37:1-14
Romans 6:3-11
Matthew 28:1-10

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Tell me a story.” My sister and I used to ask that of my father all the time when we were kids. “Dad, tell us a story.” Only a few years before Dad’s death, I discovered that the stories he told, about his childhood growing up outside of Chicago were not exactly made up completely, but not exactly 100% factually true either. Still, even with that knowledge today, I am glad that my father always fulfilled our request – he always found some new story to tell us about himself, about his parents and grandparents even.

Similarly, the stories my grandmother told me about her life growing up in Haifa, Palestine, her flight from her home as a pregnant newlywed in 1948 and her eventual immigration to the States are integral to my understanding of myself today, two generations behind her. Stories about our families, our ancestors, our familial histories are important to all of us. Even if they get a bit exaggerated in the telling, the stories we hand down to our children are one of the main ways they come to know who they are.

Every year, at the Easter Vigil, we hear the important stories of our Christian family that help us to understand our identity as God's people. These are the stories of our ancestors in faith, and they date back from well before Christ, all the way back to the beginning of the world. But make no mistake, these are very much *our* stories.

For the family of God that includes the first humans, Moses, Ezekiel and the people of Israel includes us, too. In the interest of getting home at a reasonable hour, we heard only four stories from the Old Testament read tonight, but the Prayer Book actually lists 10 of them for this evening's liturgy. And all of them tell us the same thing about ourselves. As we sat in the stillness and quiet of our darkened church, concentrating on the Paschal flame, we heard the stories that identify us as the beloved sons and daughters of the God who created us and who, again and again, throughout history, saves and redeems us through love.

This story of salvation that we heard tonight is *our* story – yours and mine – and we are integral players in this most holy narrative. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” says the writer of the letter to the Romans. His words are also the words we used to lead us into the renewal of our baptismal vows: “we are buried with Christ by baptism into his death and raised with him to newness of life.” Through our baptisms, we have each entered personally into this narrative of God's love for us.

And tonight, we celebrate the ultimate climax of that story of love and redemption as we stand, in awe, with the two Marys, at the door of an empty tomb and fall with them, in adoration, at the feet of the risen Christ. Just now, when we turned on the lights, and rang the bells and exclaimed the great acclamation of Easter, that Christ is risen indeed, we re-membered and re-told the story of God's love for us, a love into which we have been invited, in which we are embraced through our baptisms, a love so overpowering that it overcame even death and the grave.

That, indeed, is the climax of this magnificent story, but it is not the *end* of the story. "I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified," the angel tells the two Marys. "He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.'" *Go... and tell...* That's what the angel says to the first witnesses of the resurrection, and a few verses later Jesus says the same thing: "go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." *Go and tell...* Tell our story of love, life, redemption and release to others.

And so, this story is not yet over; rather, it is to be continued by the two Marys, by the disciples, by all the witnesses of resurrection, by all the followers of Christ. The women will tell this story to the disciples, and the disciples will go to Galilee where the story, the good news, can continue to be spread, not just to the people of Israel, but to all the nations, to all of God's people throughout the world. This is the story of God's love for us, overcoming death and the grave, reconciling us to God through the risen Christ. This is the story that was handed down to us, told and re-told.

This is the story that we are privileged to tell again – in our words, yes – but more importantly in our shared life together: how Christ lives among us, how the Spirit moves within us, how God's love emanates even from us, this small but faithful family of Christians who call ourselves Thankful Ones. This is our story, the story that defines us as followers of the Christ, as believers in the good news of eternal life in Him. And this is the magnificent story that we are asked to share with all God's people: Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.