Luke 24 April 21, 2019

**Easter**

**Tell Us** Today....**the Old, Old Story**

We hear now selected verses…..of….The Easter Story from Luke 24:

***24****On the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking spices they had prepared.****2****(and) they found the stone rolled away,****3****but, did not find the body.****4****While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them.****5****The womenwere terrified, but the men said, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”* ***8****Then they remembered his words,****9****and returning from the tomb, they told this..to the rest.*

 *On that same day two of them were going to Emmaus,****14****talking about all these things.****15****While they were talking, Jesus came near.****17****and said, “What are you discussing?” They stood still, looking sad.* ***18****Then one of them, Cleopas, answered, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know what has taken place?”****19****He asked, “What things?” They replied, “Things about Jesus of Nazareth. We had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel. Besides, it is now the third day since his crucifixion.****22****Moreover, some women were at the tomb early this morning,****23****and when they did not find his body, they came back and told us they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive.*

 ***25****Then he said to them, “Oh, how slow of heart you are to believe!****26****Was it not necessary the Messiahshould suffer first..to enter into his glory?”****27****Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.*

 ***31****And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.*

 ***33****That same hour they returned to Jerusalem; found the eleven and said, “The Lord has risen indeed!”*

Alleluia.

 Amen!

Have you ever noticed the faces in the crowd…that week? The hearts Jesus touched…from Friday…to Sunday??

 Take Malcchus, for example, servant of the high priest. He was just doing his job at the Garden. But this routine raid to arrest Jesus…would have been his last….if he had not been quick to duck. The torches gave him just enough light to see the flash of the sword and “swoosh!” Malchus leans back enough to save his neck…but not his ear. Peter gets a rebuke (for striking with the sword); Malchus…gets a healing touch (from Jesus), and the event is history.

 …Just history, except to Malchus.

 Had it not been for the bloodstain on his cloak, he might have awakened the next morning talking about a crazy dream he’d had. Legend says Malchus was later one of those tortured believers at Jerusalem. We don’t know for sure but we’re certain of one thing: from that night on, whenever Malchus would hear people talk about the carpenter who rose from the dead, he wouldn’t scoff. He’d tug at his earlobe and know…it was possible.

 Or, for Barabbas, another face in the crowd, it happened almost too fast to notice.

 One minute Barabbas was in his cell on death row scratching on dirt walls, and the next he was outside squinting his eyes at the bright sun.

 “You’re free to go.”

 Barabbas scratches his beard. “What?”

 “You’re free. …They took the Nazarene instead.”

 Barabbas has often been compared to us, and rightly so. We’re a lot alike: he owed his salvation to someone he never met. But you couldn’t imagine him pulling some of our stunts. **We** take - our free gift… and try to *earn it*….or *diagnose it*…or *pay for it*…instead of simply saying ☹ “thank you...**God**”!

 It’s ironic….to be “saved”… by grace. And there’s something in us that reacts against God’s free gift. We have some weird…compulsion…to create laws and regulations that make us “worthy” of God’s free gift.

 Why? Pride?

 To accept grace means to admit we need saving, and most of us don’t like that.

 But Barabbas knew better; hopelessly stranded on death row, he wasn’t about to balk at a granted stay of execution. Maybe he didn’t understand mercy and surely he didn’t deserve it, but he wasn’t about to refuse it. We would do well…to recognize our plight is…just like his. ~ But some…prefer the prison of pride, and self, when the cell door has been unlocked. We’d rather lean on our own understanding, than the Creator beyond, the God who is love.

 And finally, a third face looms from out the crowd in his story. Luke points him out, just a few words before the lesson we read. If it is true that a picture paints a thousand words then here is a Roman centurion who paints a dictionary full. All he did was see Jesus suffer. He never heard him preach, or saw him heal, or followed him through the crowds. He never witnessed him still the wind; he only saw…the way he died. But that…was all it took…to cause this weather-worn soldier to take a giant leap in faith***. “Surely, this a religious man.”*** (23:47)

 Faces in the crowd; maybe we’ve noticed them. Maybe not.

 Words…(just words) from the scripture that Day….have you felt their transforming effect?

Road. Dark. Quiet. Suspense. Grove. Trees. Alone.

Footsteps. Torches. Romans. Surprise. Swords. Kiss? Betrayal. Run! Bound.

Courtyard.

Priests. Lamps. Sanhedrin. Caiaphas. Arrogance. Calm. Shove. Kick. Annas. Messiah?! Trial…

Peter.

 “Me?” Rooster. Thrice. Guilt.

Proceedings. Court. Prosecute. Pale. Witnesses. Liars. Inconsistent. Silence. Blasphemer. Pilate. Truth. Truth?

Skull

Calvary. Crosses. Execution. Death. Wails. Wine. Bruised. Swollen. Sign. Nails.

 Pound

Pierced.

Contorted. Thirst. Terrible. Grace. Writing. Raised. Mounted. Hung. Forgiveness. Dice. Gambling. Darkness.

 Absurdity.

 Death. Life.

 Pain. Peace.

 Condemn. Promise.

 Him. Us. Earthquake, Tomb. Curtain. Spear. Blood. Water. Spices. Linen. Tomb. Waiting.

 Despair. Stone. Mary. Running. Maybe? Peter. John.  **Belief!**

Enlightenment. Truth Free! Mankind. Alive.

 Alive.

 Alive!

 Faces in the crowd…from the scripture.

 Words from the pages…of the Bible.

 And heaven….made beautiful poetry….from ugliness.

 Brothers and sisters, I simply argue Christ was not crucifed….on a cross…in a cathedral…between two candlesticks. But rather at the town crossroads so cosmopolitan that it was the gathering place for the dregs of humanity. At a place where soldiers gamble, and sinners talk smut, and prostitutes ply their trade.

 And because **that** is where he died.

 And **that**….is what he died about.

 **That**….is where the church….ought to be!

 That’s the story.

 The same, simple, old story. And that’s what it means…for us. Today!

 It means death..has lost its sting; that we…are more than conquerors through Christ; that life abundant, in us…is the key to showing the world…God at work.

 Easter is about joy and light and life and smiles and laughter…and hallelujahs that resound in every race and nation. Today is for the living, - - - ***and*** for that great cloud of witnesses around us (our grandparents, and martyrs, and the faithful for centuries past) who celebrate with us a Communion of the Saints today…and always.

 Go.

 Claim your eternal and abundant life, and change the world…for the realm of God to come……today!

 Christ has risen.

 **He has risen indeed!**

 Alleluia!

 Amen.