

Easter Sermon

April 12, 2020

Good morning on this most beautiful Easter morning during a spectacular springtime in Va. I want to welcome all of you who have joined us. These past few weeks have been revelatory for me, as they have been for my clergy colleagues. Not being able to gather in our church buildings and suddenly being faced with being filmed leading worship in a nearly empty sanctuary has been more than a little difficult. One thing I have learned for certain is that I do not want to be a televangelist when I grow up! Although I am uncomfortable being in front of a camera, we are so blessed at Westover to have Madison Landis as our videographer to make this process as painless as possible. Madison is a gifted director, camera operator, sound technician, editor, and a very welcome calming presence.

Easter is the most important day in the Christian calendar. It is even more important than Christmas if you can imagine! Christmas might have caught on in the merchandising world, but Easter is still the most significant celebration for the Christian Church. And, although you probably won't hear Easter hymns being sung in department stores and dentists offices the month before Easter Sunday, chances are also still pretty good that you won't be invited to an Easter office party where everyone stands around in their ugly Easter sweaters worrying about what to get their relatives who have everything. Easter is the single most important holy day of the Christian year because our focus is completely on telling the Resurrection Story of Jesus Christ. For Christians, Jesus' conquering death and rising from the grave is what is life changing and what matters more than anything else.

We are Easter people every day and the words "Alleluia, alleluia!" are on our lips wherever we go. Because Christ died and rose again my life is forever changed. In the words written in our Book of Common Prayer which so beautifully captures the essence of this day, "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and giving life to those in the tomb." Trampling down death by His death and giving life. Our God is a God of life, not death. It is not his will that people die.

The first year after I graduated from Virginia Seminary, I was a Chaplain in an Episcopal School in the suburbs of DC. In order to receive a diploma from that school students had to have a semester of OT and NT. One of my assignments was to teach those two portions of the Bible to middle schoolers. It was an international school with students from all over the world and there was no problem getting students to take religion until a family entered with a mother who was an atheist. She announced that her daughter would not be taking any course on the Bible because she was too old for fairy tales.

A battle of wills ensued between her and the Head of the school and the board. I stayed well out of that battle! After many meetings, the School won and it was determined that his 13 year old girl would enter my class in the middle of the semester and I would tutor her until she had caught up with her classmates. I gave her a Bible and told her that we were nearly through the Gospel of John and to read just as much as she could each night. The next day she came into my classroom during lunch and said, "Well, I read it!"

"You read the first few chapters of John? I asked.

"NO! I read the entire thing!"

"That's a lot of reading," I said. "John's gospel has 21 chapters".

"Well," she said, "It was like one of those novels where you get going and it's so good, you don't want to quit until you find out what happens at the end!"

"What did you think?" I asked.

"Do you think it's really true?" she asked. "Do you think that man named Jesus was put on trial, executed by the religious leaders who hated him, and that he then rose from the dead out of a sealed tomb?"

"Yes, yes, I do believe that it is true," I said.

She thought for a moment and then said, "Well, what I want to know is why hasn't anyone in my family told me about this because if it is true, this is extremely valuable information that could make all the difference in my life!"

A few months later she asked to be baptized into the Christian faith and two years later her family joined her and were baptized as well. She had convinced them that the Easter story of Christ's death and resurrection was extremely valuable information!"

And, it is indeed the most valuable information we will ever hear and the most valuable information we can share with others. As St. Paul said in his letter to the Christians in Rome, “If we die with Christ then shall we also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, death no longer has dominion. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? NO in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The Easter message is very valuable information indeed. It is the most valuable information you will ever hear and always have to share.

Happy Easter, dear friends.

Amen.