

Shaking Off Your Grave Clothes *John 20:19--31*

Slide: Can I please...

Picture this. It's Monday morning. You just got back from vacation. You had the most amazing trip on the planet in a warm and sunny place and you are jet lagged. To top it off, you have to get up and go to work. Your alarm goes off; you put your covers over your head and wish that you could just stay there. No amount of coffee could possibly save you.

Slide: Dinosaur chasing boy

You wish you could just hide from the world. There is too much to do. You're going back to a pile of stuff heaped high; you just know you are, because you left it that way in order to leave for vacation.

Plus, on top of all that, there's six inches of snow outside. Who is going to plow that? You. Of course, you. So, what do you do? It's a new day. How will you shake it off to begin it? You have a choice, don't you?

Slide: Christ and Disciples

I used to be hard on the disciples when this account of the Resurrection comes around every year. Here they were sitting around an upper room, huddled in fear that people were out to get them after everything that had happened. And then they hear from their sister in Christ Mary Magdalene, a trusted witness and source of the Resurrection who saw Jesus raised from the dead, and had the audacity to call it an idle, fake story.

To top it all off, a whole week later, they are still there, hiding, even after having themselves seen Jesus standing there before them despite the doors being barred and locked. If the Resurrection was such an amazing, life changing, world altering occasion, why are they still stuck there? Why are they

still afraid? Does the event change them at all? Why don't they shake it off and get out there into the world to do something about it?

Slide: Doubting...

And then, I realize that it's not that different for us. A week ago, we celebrated the same Resurrection. We yelled the ECHO from the balcony, we adorned the sanctuary with flowers, heard the brass and bells, we proclaimed the alleluias and heard the story yet again. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Then, Monday came. Easter Sunday was over. We all had sugar hangovers and life went back to how it was. Did Easter change *us*? Are *we* still stuck? Are *we* still afraid? In what way does the Easter joy really do anything? And, for me, Easter Monday is a big downer. I'm tired, and that pile that I avoided until after Easter is now right in front of me. Life still happens. Monday still came. And, it's right back in the tomb we all go.

So, along the way, in my years of being a pastor, I have ceased to criticize these disciples and instead learn from them. They are no different than we are. They were afraid. They doubted. But, they also rejoiced when they saw the Lord. And, they revealed the greatest of faith in exclaiming, "My Lord, and my God!" So, this year, especially, I look tenderly at the difficulty these first believers had and I see the same in myself and in all believers today. The Resurrection is here. But, we have a hard time shaking off our grave clothes.

Slide: Empty Tomb

Shaking off our grave clothes - that was an Instagram post of my goddaughter's this Easter Sunday. After leading her first worship service as a pastoral intern, dressed in her white alb of Holy Baptism, she smiled into the camera and posted that title. Throwing off the idea that the grave had a hold of Jesus and therefore her, she donned her white garment that symbolizes baptism and proclaimed the resurrection on

Instagram. I thought the hashtag she used was perfect.

For, in reality, we need to daily shake off the grave that desires to trap us and proclaim victory. In my sermon on Maundy Thursday, I mentioned that when we leave this place, we walk out into a Good Friday world. It's true that although the Resurrection has happened, we often have a hard time leaving the tomb and leaving the upper room, not unlike the disciples did.

And yet, that is exactly where the risen Christ meets us, where we are, sometimes proclaiming Easter and sometimes afraid of Good Friday. Christ comes into the places where we have imprisoned ourselves, into the locked places in our lives and breathes peace upon us, promising the Easter life.

Slide: Risen Christ

And, even when the tomb seems like it will close in upon us, there Christ comes, walking with us, sometimes unrecognized, but still present to breathe the promise of

goodness and life. But, this doesn't just happen separate from Good Friday, nor in the world we struggle in, but it happens alongside Good Friday. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ doesn't change our circumstances, but it does change how we see them and how we respond to those circumstances, piece by piece, step by step, until the Resurrection is fully realized at our final breath.

The Resurrection shows up all the time in this Good Friday world, at Ruby's Pantry, at Community Table, in Huston this summer with 30,000 youth, in Summer Stretch, in your time, talents and monetary support, in your visiting a friend who is dying, in your praying for a friend, in your being lifted from depression with the help of a therapist, in daily tasks of working to make this world a place still beautiful enough for our children -

THERE the Risen Christ bursts open the doors of the tomb - THERE the Risen Christ comes to you wherever you are trapped in illness, infirmity or addiction - THERE the Risen

Christ sends you out to proclaim that the Good Friday world may feel overwhelming, but it does not ultimately have the final say.

Easter Monday comes when we are still closed behind the locked doors in fear of what the world may bring. Yet Christ still comes with life and peace. Regardless of the circumstances Jesus shows up bringing peace, offering peace, embodying peace. Regardless of the circumstances Jesus shows up bringing life, offering life, embodying life. Life and peace are resurrection reality.

They do not necessarily change the circumstances of your life and of the world. Hurricanes will still form, the hungry still need to be fed, and loved ones will die. But, the life and peace of Jesus' resurrection enables us to meet and live through those circumstances. Christ breathes upon us his peace, his breath, then sends us out. We are free to shake off the grave clothes and live with the promise of eternal life.

Slide: Baptism

Today, we began our worship with a Thanksgiving for Baptism. Holy Baptism is that tangible gift – water, word, promise, commandment, that reminds us that even if it's not Easter Sunday, we live daily an Easter life. Each and every day, in the waters of baptism, we die to the Good Friday world of sin and death, and we shake off the grave to rise with Christ. Each day is a new start. Each day, Christ may surprise us.

For seven weeks, the church celebrates Easter. This season contains within itself 50 days from Easter Day to Pentecost Sunday, which this year is May 20th. I give you an Easter challenge this year. Every day, upon waking up, whether you feel horrible, happy, sad, or anything else, begin your day by simply saying – The risen Lord is with me.

Slide: The Risen Christ is...

That's it – That's all. "The risen Lord is with me." Use it as a mantra. Say it more than once if you want. Try it out. Try it on. See if it changes you. Maybe it won't. Maybe it will,

but it may just help you to see the risen Lord more in your day, more in other people, and more on the days you are in the tomb. For the promise is there: Christ comes to you when you feel imprisoned, when it's hard to believe, when it's easy to believe, and the in between of doubt and faith.

This Easter, let's shake off the grave together. For, Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.