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GET OUT OF THE HOUSE ! A SERMON ON JOHN 20:19-31

It's been one week since Easter, one week since the chaos and excitement, one week since the empty tomb, one week since our first "Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia." It's one week after the resurrection and the disciples are in the same place they were Easter night. They are in the same room behind the same locked doors.

So if the resurrection is such a big deal, such a life changing event, why are they still stuck in the same place? What difference has the empty tomb made? How has it changed them? Has it let them see themselves and their world differently? Has it done anything for them? It doesn't look as if it's made much difference. They are in the same house behind the same locked doors as a week ago. What's changed?

I wonder, one week after Easter, what has Christ's resurrection done for us? Is your life different? Do you see and engage the world in new ways? What difference has the empty tomb made in your life over the last week? When I look at my life it looks a whole like it did last Sunday, the week before, and the week before that. And when I look at the world it looks pretty much the same as before.

I used to hear today's gospel (John 20:19-31) and be critical of the disciples. They are stuck in the same place. They should have done better than that. After all death has been defeated. "Christ is risen. Alleluia." Why aren't their lives different?

I was really asking about my own life. Why isn't my life different after Easter? Why am I stuck in the same place? I should be doing better than that. I should be living the resurrection better, more powerfully, more fully, more authentically, than what I am. After all, "The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia."

I've begun, however, to hear today's gospel differently from how I used to. Here's what I think today's gospel is telling us:

Christ's resurrection is a big deal; The empty tomb is a life changing event;

The resurrection does make a difference in our lives; and It also takes time.

Resurrection takes time. It is not a one time event. It's something that we grow into. It's a process. It's a way of being and a life to be lived. By the grace of God we evolve into resurrected people through our relationships and the circumstances of our lives. God wastes nothing. Every day we are stepping into the resurrected life. It's not always easy and some days are just plain hard.

I wonder if we sometimes come to Easter Sunday and the empty tomb expecting to wake up on Monday to a whole new life and world. I am guessing that you awoke on Easter Monday to the same life and world you had on Good Friday. I did. It's not because the resurrection failed or because Jesus didn't do "the Jesus thing" in our lives. It's because the Jesus thing takes time.

Maybe we need to let go of the fact of the empty tomb and start claiming the story of resurrection. There's a difference between facts and story. Facts are one dimensional, stories are multidimensional. Facts inform the mind, stories touch the heart. Facts transmit information, stories transform lives. Think about it like this. A fact is static, like a snapshot of a particular moment in time. A story is dynamic, like a movie that takes us across time.

The empty tomb is a fact. Resurrection is a story. Maybe we need to begin to understand resurrection as the movie of our life instead of a snapshot of Christ's life. The fact of the empty tomb is not the story of the resurrection. The facts of Jesus life are not the story of Jesus. The facts of your life and my life are not the story of our life.

The facts are just the starting point for the story. The fact of the empty tomb is the starting point for the resurrection story. Whatever facts you woke up to on Easter Monday are simply the starting point for your story of resurrection. Too often, however, we take the facts as the entire story. Isn't that what we've done with St. Thomas?

What facts come to mind when you hear his name? He was a doubter. “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” That Thomas doubted may be the only fact that comes to mind. It is so prevalent that we call him Doubting Thomas.

What if that fact, however, is just the starting point for his resurrection? What if it is not the whole story? What if where we start is less important than where we go, where we end?

Do you know the end of Thomas’ story? Do you know where he died? He died in India. He was the apostle to the people of India. He brought the gospel of Christ to India. He died a martyr after he was run through with five spears by five soldiers. That doesn’t sound much like a doubter, does it? It sounds like someone who grew and changed, someone for whom the resurrection of Christ was real, someone for whom the empty tomb made a difference. It just took a little time, as it does for most, maybe all of us. We know Doubting Thomas but let’s not forget Confessing Thomas. He’s in today’s gospel as well. “My Lord and my God!” With those words Thomas has recognized and named a new relationship, a new worldview, a new way of being. Somewhere between Doubting Thomas and Confessing Thomas is the story of resurrection in Thomas’ life.

All that stuff about Doubting Thomas, the fact of his disbelief, is just Thomas’ starting place, nothing more and nothing less. It’s neither good nor bad. It’s a starting place. And we all have our starting places. What is your starting place? What are the facts of your life today? The starting place for the story of our resurrection is whatever is. Whatever your life is today, whatever your circumstances are, that’s the starting point for your story of resurrection. So if you’re dealing with deep loneliness, sorrow, and loss, that’s your starting point. That’s the room which Christ enters. If you are locked in a house of fear, confusion, or darkness, that’s your starting point and the place in which Jesus stands. If illness, old age, disability, or uncertainty are facts of your life, that’s your starting point and the place in which Jesus shows up. If you feel lost, betrayed, disappointed, overwhelmed, that’s your starting point and the house Jesus enters. If joy, gratitude, and celebration are the facts of your life today, that’s the starting point for your story of resurrection.

All those things I just described and a thousand others are the many ways the doors of our house get locked. Whatever it might be for you, it is just the starting point.

The great tragedy is not that the disciples are in the same house behind the same locked doors. That’s just their starting place. The great tragedy will be if the disciples refuse to unlock the doors, refuse to open the doors, and refuse to get out the house.

What are the doors that are locked in your life? What are the things that have kept you stuck in the same place? I’ll say it again, that’s just the starting place. Don’t judge it as good or bad, right or wrong. It’s just where you are and it’s the place Christ shows up. It happened twice in today’s gospel. Both times the disciples are in the same house behind the same locked doors and Jesus shows up. He stands in the midst of them. The walls and the locked doors of their house could not keep Jesus out. And the walls and locked doors of your house will not keep him out.

He steps into the midst of our house, through the locked doors, and breathes peace and life into us. He breathes peace and hope into us. He breathes peace and courage into us. He breathes peace and strength into us. And that breath of peace is the key that unlocks the door. So take a deep breath, take it all in, let it fill and enliven you. Let it give you the hope, courage, and strength to unlock and open the doors of your life, and then get out of the house.

Open the doors to the story of your resurrection and get out of the house !

Parish Prayer Day for Marriage and Family Life 20th April Theme: All Families

On the 20th of each month, our parish of Malin prays for the 24 hours for Marriage & Family Everyone is invited to join in prayer, either by taking on an hour, or by including this intention in their own prayer during that day.

Some thoughts: It is in the home that Christian faith is at its best and sometimes also at its worst. The home is a community that is rooted in love. It is also a community that is committed to love as its way of life. It is where each person has the best chance to be loved as she or he is; where each one can have freedom to become her or his own unique person – and this is not just about the children!; where each one can make mistakes and know that they will be forgiven and even understood.

- But the family cannot find its way on its own. The parish community is vital for the growth and well-being of each family. It is from the parish community that the family can be reminded of the values we hold in following Christ. And it is there also that each family can find support in trying to live out those values of love and generosity and faith.