

We had a Funeral Today

Easter Vigil

We had a funeral today. If anyone had offered me a bet on Palm Sunday, I would have bet you \$1,000 that the last thing I would be doing on Holy Saturday morning, was conducting a funeral at Christ Episcopal Church. It's a good thing no one offered me that bet.

Because at eleven o'clock this morning, here I was helping a family say goodbye to their 34-year-old son. When I first received the phone call from the mother on Wednesday, asking about a funeral, I thought – this can never happen. You just don't have funerals on Holy Saturday. But the voice on the other end of the phone was very distressed, and this was the day that worked best for the family to come in from out of town, so I said okay.

When the family arrived this morning, the church was still bare. Naked and empty as we saw it at the end of the service on Maundy Thursday. The parents of the deceased arrived so early, that the Altar

Guild had a little bit of time to continue getting the church ready for this evening, and for Easter Day. So while the church was barren when the family arrived, by the time the service began the cross was back in place the altar was covered in its festival frontal, some of the flowers were in.

As we began the service I realized that maybe Holy Saturday was actually the perfect time to conduct a funeral.

During that liminal time – the time in-between. It was after Good Friday, and it wasn't Easter yet, but we knew that Easter was coming. A time in-between when you can actually see and experience the barrenness and sorrow and grief that does sometimes fill our lives. And while we are in the midst of that pain, we can also see and experience the fullness and joy and hope that is God's best plan for our lives.

Now, we find ourselves back in this place. A place where so much has happened in the last week. Shouts of hosanna on Palm Sunday. The sound of laughter and friendship and love as we washed each other's feet on Maundy Thursday. Shouts of crucify him on Good Friday. Watching – in our mind's eye – as God was executed on a cross. A family coming here this morning, to grieve over the all-too-soon death of a son.

A place where so much has happened in the last week.

We've heard so much of the story of our salvation history in scripture tonight. The plan for humanity that has always been in the mind of God.

That we share creation with God.
That creation is a good thing.
That God has always been ready to save and redeem us.
That the salvation and redemption of creation – all of creation – has always been in the mind of God.

We always need to hear these stories after the experiences of Holy Week. As the drama and liturgies of Holy Week go on-and-on we can lose sight of what we understand to be that plan of God. Things start to go downhill pretty fast, and it seems that we just go from bad to worse. It's a good thing to hear those stories again, especially tonight.

There are two things that I especially like about this Easter selection from Luke's Gospel. The first is pretty obvious. All of the people who make that first trip to the tomb are women. They arrive, prepared to do what they always do. All the miracles aside, all of the politics aside, all of the social justice issues aside, there's a young man who's dead. They've either know him, his entire life, or they've become his friends since he grew up. And now, he's dead, and they arrive, prepared to do what they always do. Take care of the body. Because they know that's what his parents would have wanted. But when they arrive at the tomb,

the body isn't there. They are confused, even terrified, by what they see. *Why do you look for the living among the dead?* they are asked.

And then we come to the part of Luke's story that I like most of all.

They remember.
They go.
They tell.

The women remember the words of Jesus. They return to the eleven and all the rest. And they tell. They do all of that on their own. Other gospel stories of the resurrection have angels, or even Jesus, instructing those whom come to the tomb on what to do next. Where to go – who to tell – and what to tell them.

But not these ladies. They remember. They go. They tell. That's what they *really* had been prepared to do, all along. They just hadn't realized it yet.

We gather here tonight, in the footsteps of Mary Magdalene, of Joanna, and of Mary the mother of James. It is now our turn.

Our turn to remember the stories and the history of our salvation.
Our turn to go to wherever our lives may take us.
Our turn to tell the good news.

The good news that is the eternal answer to the question *Why do you look for the living among the dead?* Alleluia! Christ is risen.