

John 20:1-10

Easter hasn't changed much over the years. Everybody was running back then, and we're still running today. Mary ran from the tomb. Peter and John ran to the tomb. We run around getting ready at home and dash to the car to make it in time for the 7:00 Sunrise Service. And we rush from one house to another all afternoon to be able to eat and visit with both sides of the family. It just wouldn't be Easter without all that running.

But Easter hasn't changed much over the years in another way. After Peter and John raced to the tomb, they took a good look around, spent a little time there, and then it says, "They went away again to their own homes." And that's us. We run to church, sing the Easter hymns, listen to the Easter story, spend some time here, and then we, too, go back to our own homes.

We're Easter groundhogs. We come out of our holes with the rising of the sun, but because of the shadows of our sins, we quickly disappear again until next Easter. But I'm standing before you today to announce to you that we don't have to be Easter groundhogs anymore. We can live in the light of the Son each and every day of the year.

Two days ago Christians celebrated Good Friday. All your sins were carried by Jesus. He went to the cross and He died there for you. The dark shadows of your sins were buried within His tomb. And on the third day, when the stone was rolled away, those shadows were gone. There is a blaze of light coming from His tomb because Jesus has risen. And that means you, my friend, are forgiven. You need not live in darkness and fear anymore. Your God died and rose again for you. You don't have to be afraid of the light because God's Light does not cast any shadows. You, the baptized children of God, are holy and blameless in His eyes because of Christ, and that is how you can live before Him.

The Easter Gospel tells us that when John entered the tomb, he believed but "did not understand." And that's remarkable. Seeing the empty tomb, John believed that Jesus had risen even though he did not yet understand what the Scriptures said about it. Do you see? John believed because he saw nothing. If he had seen something—anything—he wouldn't have believed. There was no note signed by Jesus. There were no footprints leading out of the tomb. There was nothing. The linens were there, but not Jesus.

Hollywood producers are telling us today that John was in the wrong tomb, and that's why Jesus wasn't there. No, Hollywood is wrong; the Scriptures are right. And what this means for us is that we don't have to fully understand it all. Even though we see nothing today, we like John, can still believe. The "nothing" that John saw means everything to us. If someone asks you what you believe in as a Christian, you could say, "I believe in 'nothing.'" The fact that John and Peter saw nothing in the tomb—no body, no note, nothing—is the reason why you come to church at 7:00 on Easter morning, and sing the Easter hymns, and listen attentively to the Easter message. Because that "nothing" that we believe in is everything to us.

Jesus was not in the tomb—nothing there, so that in Augusta, Missouri today, He is here to give you everything. He left the tomb to be with you here in the preaching of His Word. He rose from His grave to be present for you here in the bread and wine of this sacred

meal. Jesus left His tomb to come to you here in the washing of Holy Baptism—so that in all these holy things Jesus now gives you every gift and blessing God has to give.

And isn't it remarkable that when we, like John, take a good look around we, too, see nothing. John saw the linen wrappings and the face cloth, but he did not see Jesus, and yet he believed. When we look into the baptismal font we see water but no Jesus. When we look beneath the linens on the altar we see bread and wine but no Jesus. And yet we believe. Because the Scriptures which testified that Jesus would rise from the dead also testify that Jesus has risen to be present for us in His Word and Sacraments.

The joy and celebration of Easter, therefore, is not what we do on this one day. It's what Jesus does for you every time you hear His Word and receive His flesh and blood. The meaning of Easter is not that we can crawl out of our holes one day a year to take a look at the empty tomb. Easter's meaning is that Jesus has risen to be with you and for you each and every day through His Word proclaimed and His Sacrament's given.

And it's not all that important if we don't fully understand it. Mary was confused and upset. Peter and John were bewildered and not understanding it at all. But that did not change what had happened. Jesus had risen. He had risen for them. And their confusion could not keep the Risen Lord from coming to them with His eternal gifts.

God doesn't expect you and me to understand how Jesus can give us His body and blood in the bread and wine. But He does give us faith to believe it. God doesn't require us to fully grasp how the water of baptism with God's Word can bring us from death to life, make us His dear children, and give us His eternal gifts. He simply does it, for this He has promised. And in doing it He gives us the faith to believe it.

Even though the groundhog may disappear into the ground for another year; that does not prevent the sun from shining. God doesn't love you only when you come here to sing His praises. He loves you even when you're burrowing away from Him. God doesn't smile upon you because of what you do for Him. You have His favor every day because you are His baptized child. Jesus is not going to crawl back into His tomb when you and I offend Him by our sinful living. He is here for you to stay because we need His word of forgiveness—and it's yours! No matter what you do in secret, Jesus forgives you for it. No matter what wicked thoughts enter your mind, Jesus gives you His body and blood to cleanse you completely.

Jesus is no "Easter groundhog." He doesn't come out of His tomb this one day each year to shine on you here with His love and mercy. He is always here for you. His mercy continues day after day for you. Every time you come to His House, He delights in bespeaking you righteous. You don't have to understand it to believe it. Even the tiniest newborn baby, baptized into Christ, believes just as John believed without any understanding.

And because we believe in the Risen Christ we want to grow up in Him, and hear of His love for us, learning more and more about Him. John, Peter, and Mary were not content to remain confused and bewildered, and not understanding. Because they believed in Christ, they grew in the Faith, learning what Jesus' resurrection meant for them.

Do you believe? Then grow up in Christ. Do not be content to have a feeble grasp of His resurrection. Put away the milk and begin eating solid food. Don't burrow back into the shelter of your hole. Live in the Sunshine of God's grace and mercy. Don't be an "Easter groundhog." Christ has freed you from your fears. He has forgiven your sins. His light is now your light. His resurrection is for you. His heaven is yours.

Because Easter means everything to you today, then it will mean everything to you tomorrow, and the next day, and the next. And then that day will come when you will be facing your own tomb. But you will not be afraid because you have faith in the Risen Christ. And you have learned more and more that He is for you in life and in death. Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed!) Amen.