

Luke 24:1-12

We all enjoy Christmas nativity pageants. So why not an Easter pageant? Instead of the children dressing up as Mary and Joseph, the angel, and the shepherds, we would have some of our women play the part of the ones who went to the tomb on Easter morning, and the rest of us could play the part of the disciples who were huddled together and those other followers of Jesus who were with them on Easter.

But if we actually had such a pageant, it really would not be enjoyable at all. It would rather be one great big let-down. We would want to be accurate and stay true to the Easter narrative. Therefore the women who would play that role would have to be perplexed and frightened, for this is what our text says about them, and the rest of us acting in the role of Jesus' disciples would have to ridicule these women and refuse to believe them when they tell us what the angels said about Jesus being risen from the dead. Is it any wonder why churches don't have Easter pageants? It would be too depressing.

So instead we gather together on Easter morning, early, just like on the first Easter. But when we hear the news that Jesus is risen, we don't call it nonsense like they did centuries ago; rather we respond (say it with me), "He is risen indeed! Alleluia!" It's really too bad, isn't it, that we weren't there on that first Easter. We could have showed them how it's done.

So what do we have today that they didn't have back then? It's faith, isn't it? Easter faith. Take that away and all you have left is confusion, fear and unbelief; basically what we see in our Easter text. But when you add Easter faith, you have joy, great singing, the exchanging of alleluias and Easter greetings, peace, hope, and so much more. We really cannot have Easter without faith; and you cannot have faith without Easter. The two are inseparable.

So here we are...it's Easter; we hear the good news of the resurrection; and we respond in faith. Now before we injure our backs by patting them too hard with our own hands, let's keep in mind that Easter is always in the present tense. What I mean is that it's always Easter. Jesus never dies again. He is always our resurrected Lord. Each and every Sunday throughout the Church Year is truly a mini-Easter, for we never gather around a dead Jesus, but always around our Living Savior. And when we are not gathered together here, we are out in the world as people of God who are to exhibit our Easter faith.

The point of all this is that while we may have Jesus' disciples beat on the day of Easter, they appear to beat us, and rather easily, in the long run. They start very slow. Like the tortoise in the classic race. It appears that the tortoise isn't moving forward at all. "He is risen!" announces the angels. But these disciples reply, "that's nonsense," and crawl back into their shell.

But if they are the tortoise, you and I are the hare - the rabbit. We come be-bopping into church on Easter morning cheerfully, and singing jubilantly, agreeing that Christ is risen indeed, Alleluia! We take off like the hare in the race leaving the tortoise in our dust. But it's not a one-day race. The course is laid out to last our entire life. And as you know, the tortoise keeps plodding along.

So yes, Jesus' disciples started slow. But keep watching them. They pick up the pace. Read the book of Acts and see for yourself. They become faithful Christians. They assemble together each and every Sunday to hear the words of life, to pray, to fellowship, and to receive the Sacrament of the Lord's body and blood. Yes, they called Jesus' resurrection nonsense on Easter morning. But throughout the rest of

their lives they live as witnesses to the resurrection. They, who are the tortoise, win the race by finishing the course laid out for them.

And I'm afraid to say, because it's true, that we appear to be the exact opposite. In the classic race, the hare gets beat. Oh he starts well, just like us this morning. But he gets easily distracted and doesn't keep his mind in the race. And if any of us are in the habit of not being faithful on Sunday mornings throughout the year, and at the Communion table, we are that hare. We may say that Christ is Risen, Alleluia! today, but do we live this Easter faith all year long? A question for each one of us to ponder, as well as a time to reflect and repent.

So how does the hare become like the tortoise? How do we keep the Lord's death and resurrection before us throughout the year and through our entire life, so we finish the race? We need to go back to the truth that Easter is always in the present tense. If we think of Easter as one particular day in the year, once this day is past we lose our proper focus just like the hare in the race. The same is true of baptism. If our baptism is simply one particular event that took place in the past, it loses its meaning for us. Because we don't live in the past; we live in the present.

Consider with me the Children of Israel. When they passed through the Red Sea, that was one special day in their life. A glorious day. One of victory over their enemies by the grace of God. Yet God was always drawing their attention to that day. Years later he addresses His people as those who passed through the sea. This victorious act of God was to always be in the front of their minds in the present tense.

And so with us. Easter, Christ, baptism. All of these are in the present tense. And these all go together. This is who you are, summed up by Easter, Christ and baptism. You are people of God who died with Christ and rose with him in your baptism. Your baptism finds its meaning in Christ's resurrection on Easter. Your faith is strengthened by remembering your baptism. Your hope is thus renewed, and you have joy and peace. You're back in the race moving forward with Christ. It's all tied together...Easter, baptism, Christ, faith, hope. And the foundation is your baptism into Christ, into His death and resurrection. Take that away, away from your minds, put it only in your past and not in your present, and you and I lose focus, and our finishing the race is in jeopardy.

Now we do not have a grand Easter service every Sunday throughout the year. But every Sunday we do remember our baptism through the Invocation, the Confession and Absolution. And every day we remember our baptism by making the sign of the cross.

So here's the thing...you, my friend, have a living Savior. He was dead, but now He is alive. And He lives for you...yes, each and every one of you. Have you lived as if He did not matter? Yes, you have, and so have I. Have you lived as though Jesus was more of an historical figure in the past, and not a present reality for you? Yes you have, and so have I. Friend, He forgives you. He forgives each and every one of you. And His forgiveness is right now in the present. It's real, as real as your baptism is real. It's true, as true as the fact that He rose from the dead. It's liberating, freeing you from the power of sin in your life. And His forgiveness is for you.

Jesus is no rabbit. He is the tortoise, always moving faithfully forward. And because He lives in you, He keeps moving you forward to finish the race. And all because, He is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia! Amen.