

Just for fun I googled “Easter.” In 3/100^{ths} of a second – I had just under 70 million hits. There are pages dedicated to calculating the date of Easter – so if you want to know when Easter Sunday is in the year 2348 – I can tell you – April 18! In 4099 Easter will be on the 19th!! There are other pages dedicated to telling you the history of Easter, pages defining Easter, pages that give you ideas about Easter crafts for your kids & Easter recipes for family gatherings. There are even pages loaded with Easter sermons – in case this one doesn’t “do it” for you.

But as I scanned the internet, and I must admit that I didn’t look at all 70 million pages, I didn’t find much out there that could tell me what Easter really means – beyond the definition, history and tradition. It is important for us, as we gather here today, to find the meaning of Easter for each one of us. IF we don’t, then today is not much more than any other day...So, what does Easter mean for you, day in and day out?

Well, what Easter means depends a lot on how we react to Easter. In the story that I read for you from John’s version of the first Easter morning highlights three different reactions to the resurrection of Jesus. We could call the first reaction to the resurrection – simple acceptance. Turn to page 16 of your bulletin and look at verse 8. There we see the reaction of the “other disciple” when he looked in. It says, “he believed.” What is missing is any indication of what he believed. Did he

believe that Jesus rose from the dead or that he just was not there? His belief is non-specific, general, random. It's like the 86% of Americans who say that they believe in God – there is a belief, and acknowledgement, an acceptance of the existence of God – but that existence doesn't make a difference in the life of the one who believes, acknowledges, accepts.

The very next verse tells us what impact the resurrection had on Peter and “the other disciple.” Verse 10 says, “then the disciples returned to their homes.” Jesus is raised – ho-hum. That is the impact of general, non-specific belief on our lives – “ho – hum.” It is as if the disciples are saying, “I hope this doesn't mean that I have to do something now?”

But that is not the only reaction to the resurrection that we see in this version of the story. After the disciples leave, Mary is left there alone. She is heart-broken that the body of the one who meant so much to her is gone. Maybe she is heart broken because she believed that the One in whom she had placed all her trust and hope and faith is dead! But even in her grief, she is willing to take another look inside that tomb. She is curious, she wants to investigate, perhaps there is more here than meets the eye. She bends down, makes an effort to see and for that, she is rewarded.

The resurrection is not an easy pill to swallow. In fact, if you think about it, it's harder for some to believe in the resurrection than it is to believe in the Easter Bunny. God knows that. God knows that our rational, logical minds get in the way of our ability to simply believe that something is so. Maybe that is right where you are today? I don't know, but there may be some of you that are here because it is the thing to do and your really not too sure about all this resurrection stuff. That's OK – at least you're here – willing to take another look and see what this is all about.

Mary's effort is rewarded when she not only encounters these angels, but she meets Jesus in person. He is not some spectral image or residual energy – Jesus is not a ghost, hoax or cool CGI effect. Jesus is real and speaks and interacts with Mary.

For those who are willing to take a look, to investigate, to be curious about the resurrection and about Jesus – God delivers. The invitation in the story is to spend some time looking at what the empty tomb means for you. The invitation is to take a closer look at what a relationship with God is all about. The invitation is to be curious, ask questions, even the hard ones –it's OK God can handle our questions. Mary, even though she was heart broken over the fact that the body was gone – which tells me that she did not believe that Jesus rose from the dead – even in her

doubt – she is willing to take one more look – at that is when she discovers the meaning of the resurrection.

The meaning of the resurrection for Mary is the same, I believe for you and me. Simply put the resurrection means three things for us today. First, the resurrection means that Jesus is exactly who he said he was. Jesus did not claim to be a really smart prophet and teacher. Jesus did not claim to be one of those “life coaches” you see on TV – motivational speakers like Tony Robbins. Jesus did not claim that he had the key to an easy, financially free life – I don’t think he ever wrote a book or appeared on Oprah. The only thing that Jesus claims is that he is God – and he was right!!

Secondly, the resurrection means that Jesus always does what he says he will do. Jesus said that he would die and then be raised. That is what happened. The Roman government testifies to his death and over 500 folks and 2,000 years of the Church testify to his resurrection. Jesus is God and Jesus will always do what Jesus says he will do!

Third, God always delivers on what God’s promises. What does God promise? A life of comfort, financial freedom or a life absent the every day troubles that plague most of humanity? Nope! I don’t care what you hear on the TV by some preachers that claim that God will somehow bless you into wealth and

happiness – that is just not the truth. What does God promise you? A life of meaning – a life of purpose – a life of discernment – a life where your perspective is wider and clearer than it could ever be. God promises life in its abundance and once you taste that life, you will (1) wonder why you didn't explore this much earlier in your life and (2) you will want to share it with everyone you meet.

The last reaction to the resurrection is one that is very familiar to many. When Mary finally realizes that Jesus is alive, she wants to grab onto him and hold him. Jesus tells her not to. Many in the church want to cling to Jesus, keep him for our own. Box him up and store him away where he will be safe. But that is not what the resurrection is all about. Jesus tells Mary not to “hold on” to him because that is not what he is to be about now – he has work to do and so does she. Jesus needs to go to the Father and then go to Galilee. Mary, on the other hand, needs to go and tell that she has seen Jesus. I guess Jesus could have done that just fine if he wanted to, but (and here is where the rubber hits the road) the resurrection means that we have now been chosen to be the ones that announce that Jesus is alive.

For reasons that I cannot fathom – God chose me and God chose you and God chose the Church to be the agent of announcing to the world that the tomb is empty and Jesus is alive and because of that – we have life – real life – abundant life. In a interesting way, we are called to take on the role of Jesus in the world. To do what

he did, go where he went, be who he was to all the people that are in such desperate need of hearing Jesus and touching Jesus and being loved by Jesus.

Sounds like an awesome task – and it is. But because the tomb really was empty, because Jesus really is alive, because all the stuff that we have been saying and reading and singing about really is true – we know that we can be up to the task of telling the world that Jesus Christ is Risen. He is risen!! R/ AMEN.