

Tell it Again!

Matthew 28:1-10 (John 20:1-10)
Resurrection of our Lord (Easter Sunday)

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April 16, 2017 (8:00, 9:30 & 11:00)

When our children were little, babies and toddlers, especially, our bedtime routine was pretty well set. As in *Set in Stone*, with a limited number of variations. After dinner and a bath, they'd settle into their beds and we'd read stories and then sing some songs. It was usually two or three stories, and while the first one might change from time to time, but the second one stayed the same for months at a time and the final one was always the same—Goodnight moon. Even with their eyes closed, even half asleep or more, they would never let us skip a page, or miss a word, God forbid we'd ever not tell one of the stories. Even when we had gotten to the point of knowing the story by heart, still the routine was to read it again from the book.

And here's the thing about these stories we told our children, whether they were familiar or brand new, whether they were read from the book or memorized and delivered by heart, not once did our children respond to one of these stories by asking "what does this mean?" or even "could you explain this to me, dad?" Instead, they either silently—almost reverently—took it all in, or else they exclaimed just as soon as we were done, "Tell it again!"

Tell it again—tell the story again and again and again. We are, after all, creatures who tend to make meaning through stories. Through the telling and retelling of stories. We tell stories to locate ourselves in place and time, to both remember the past and to build on it, to propel ourselves from past through the present and into the future. Even as adults, there's a kid inside us somewhere that when they hear a story, a well-told story or an important story, a meaningful story or an identifying story—we, too want to say when we get to the end "Let's hear it once more. Tell it one more time."

See, here I want to pull back the curtain just a little bit on a process you might call a Preacher's dilemma—finding something new to say when you tell the same old story over and over. It's an ongoing problem, of course, a nearly weekly struggle, but it's intensified on days like today—Easter, Christmas, Pentecost, Mother's Day. When I think about how we as human beings react to hearing familiar stories, when I think about

how children in particular respond to a story, brand new ones, sure, but even more so familiar stories, I am greatly comforted in the midst of this dilemma. Tell it again, my children said to me after an old familiar story. Tell it again, I hear my own heart say, when I get to share something that's been shared many times before. Tell it again, we all say, each in our own ways, as we confront the stories that are central to our faith, our lives, our community, our very being.

Here, of course, is one such story. A story central to our faith, central to our lives as believers in Christ and followers of Jesus, a story that shapes our community, a story that speaks to our inner-most being. On the first day of the week at early dawn, the women went to see Jesus' tomb. But when they got there, they didn't find Jesus; instead they found that the great stone had been rolled back and that angel was there—whose arrival and appearance scared the guards so much that they became like dead men. Don't be afraid, said the angel, for Jesus is not here—he is risen, just as he said. Then the angel gave the women this command: Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' Go, they say to the women. Tell the disciples. See, even in this telling of the story there is a command to go and tell the story. Tell them what I told you. Tell them what you've seen. Tell the story. Tell it again and again and again!

For as long as I can remember, I have been particularly drawn to *another* telling of the Easter story, a version from the gospel of John, where, after the women are confronted with the angel at the empty tomb they do go and tell the disciples, and for at least two of them, Peter and John, their response to hearing this story is to take off running for the tomb. Here's one of my favorite images of that scene—Peter and John running to the tomb early on Easter morning. So, in this telling of the story, these two disciples make a beeline for the tomb, each one running as fast as he can. We're told that John gets to the tomb first and stops at the entrance, looking in, almost reverently. But then comes Peter, who does not stop at the entrance but runs right into the empty tomb.

Now, I think I've related to THIS Easter story for a long, long time, and in particular I identify with the disciple Peter in this story—for obvious reasons, right? But it's not just the

name. It's the way Peter acts and reacts in this story. It's especially the way I've imagined that Peter acts and reacts in this story—which came into finer focus for me again this year. I mean, Peter has always been depicted as the older of the two disciples—maybe even a generation older than John. So, naturally, when they take of on a foot race, John pulls out to an early lead. I mean, he's young, he's fit, right out of seminary, whatever, while Peter is old, grey, out of shape, but nonetheless determined to get to the tomb as quickly as he can.

Now, never having been to the holy land, for some reason I picture the last part of the run being down a big hill—and the younger, fitter John not only gets there first, he's able to stop on a dime at door of the tomb. But not Peter. He hits the top of that hill, going full throttle (for him, at least) and just Can. Not. Stop! He barrels down the hill, at least thinking to himself, if not actually shouting out loud “No Brakes!” he runs right past John, right into the tomb, and only comes to a complete stop when his two outstretched arms hit full force onto the far wall of the tomb. Bam! That's how this disciple named Peter encounters the empty tomb for the first time. Full speed ahead. Wouldn't stop even if he could. It's not just physical, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, this is how he encounters the reality of the resurrection. No holds barred. All in. Full contact discipleship.

And to Peter, and John and the rest of the remaining disciples, just like the women who make their way to the tomb first, this full force, can't-stop-won't-stop, momentum-filled, nearly out of control experience *first* of the empty tomb, *then* of the risen Christ, this is what motivates them to do exactly what the angel tells them to do—Tell the story. Tell it again and again and again. Women, go tell Peter and John, Peter and John, go tell the other disciples, other disciples, go tell anybody, everybody else.

Go quickly and tell the others, “He is risen from the dead, he is going on ahead of you.

Isn't that just like Jesus? Jesus, the one in all those stories who so often got there first, once again is going on ahead. Jesus, the one who waited on the shore while the boat was still at sea; Jesus, the one who taught his followers in parables that still confuse us to

this day; Jesus, who dared to challenge the authorities of both political and religious society; Jesus, the one who prayed for forgiveness even for those who tortured and executed him; Jesus, the first born of the dead, the risen, conquering one. This same Jesus, now risen, will go on ahead of all of them.

The resurrected Jesus will go on ahead of us, too, outrunning not just Peter but John, outpacing all of us, calling us into God's future. The point of the story of Easter is not to linger at a tomb that is empty. The point is to go and to tell. Go faithfully forward, to head in the direction that the risen Christ is leading, into the future that only God knows is possible. And then tell, tell the story of this loving, laughing, serving, suffering, risen, reigning Jesus, the one who goes ahead of us into a future that cannot and will not be defined by death or grief or loss. Tell the story of Jesus who goes before us into a future of peace and love, justice and truth, restoration and reconciliation.

This story tells that Jesus is waiting for us. Waiting for us to go. Waiting for us to tell. Some stories need to be told again and again. So it is with the story of Easter, a story that reminds us that we belong to God and to each other, that reminds us, too, that Jesus is out ahead of us, calling us to God's future. Tell the story. Tell it again. And again and again and again.

Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed.**

Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed.**

Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed.**

Alleluia. **Alleluia.** Amen.