

## The Last Word is God

Welcome to Trinity Cathedral on this wonderful Easter Day. Thank you for being here. Thank you especially for finding your way into the sanctuary. Last year we celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone for this beautiful cathedral. This year we are acknowledging that old buildings need attention. In this case it is tuckpointing, removing decaying mortar and deteriorating stones and replacing them with fresh ones. There's a good metaphor for the spiritual life in there somewhere, but somehow I think most of you don't think of yourselves as an old building that needs repairs. If you do, then by all means, get your joints freshened up.

Some of you may be here today for the first time. Some may be here every week. Most are probably somewhere in between. Whichever description fits you, welcome. One of the wonderful things about the Episcopal Church is that it welcomes everyone, whoever you are.

We just heard the Easter story about the empty tomb and the reappearance of the resurrected Jesus. I imagine you expected that. It may sound like a very familiar story. But even if you have heard it every Easter for most of your life, I hope it sounded a bit different this year. It should. *You* are different. You have lived another year. The world has taken another crazy spin around the sun. The story is always the same, but we are not. I think that's the difference, the crack, through which God comes and encounters us in *this* story *this* year.

Or rather, in *these* stories. We heard more than one. Peter appears in two of them. Peter, the disciple who had denied that he knew Jesus three times in order to save his own skin, found himself running breathlessly to see the empty tomb. Older than his companion, he couldn't get there first, but when he did he fearlessly went in headlong to see its emptiness. He knew something was up, but at that point didn't connect all the dots.

We catch up with Peter again in the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles. By this time he has become one of the chief spokesmen for the band of Jesus-people. He's still stuck in his ways, however, and God needs to do something about that. Being a good Jew, he doesn't have much time for non-Jews, rather like some church people who have trouble understanding that God loves everyone, no exceptions. So God decides to shake Peter up a bit and send him a devout Gentile, a non-believer named Cornelius. Just in case Peter won't get the point, God also tells him in a dream that someone is coming and to treat him well. When Cornelius does show up and the dream comes true, Peter is convicted. He has to tell the story he knows so well, the story about a man named Jesus Christ who was no longer in that tomb.

Paul was another big name in the early church. He had to rely on the stories of others because he didn't get in the program until after he had tried to destroy it. Once he believed, however, he was in wholeheartedly. He kept his same cockiness – did you notice that he claimed that he worked harder than any of the other apostles? – but he's quick to say that he did it by the grace of God. Personally, I'm rather glad that Paul is not in this church, and even more glad that he's not a priest or pastor somewhere. Do you really want a church leader to be someone who keeps getting run out of town and has trouble staying out of jail?

The stories of Peter and Paul are joined by Mary in the third reading, and all of them point toward the same message: this Jesus Christ whom they knew to be dead was suddenly alive again. At the tomb Mary was so overcome with her grief, eyes filled with tears, head bowed down, that she couldn't even recognize Jesus when he stood beside her. But she knew that voice when it said her name: "Mary." She grabbed Jesus and held on tight. But Jesus had a job for her to do, just like Jesus has work for all of us. "Do not hold on to me," he said. "But go to my brothers." And go she did, the first witness of the resurrection, and told her simple story: "I have seen the Lord." She did a better job than Peter and the other disciple who had run to the tomb before her.

These stories that we heard are the same as they have been since they were first written down. How do they have meaning within our own stories, this year? How do they intersect with what we have left outside this building and to which we will return, stories of #MeToo and March for Our Lives, and all of the other ways that our world seems filled with suffering and violence?

The Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Michael Curry, spent Holy Week in the Middle East, meeting with persecuted and fearful Christians in Jordan and Jerusalem. In his Easter message from the Holy Land he says this:

But on that third day after the crucifixion, when by the titanic power of God, by the power of the love of God, Jesus was raised from the dead. God sent a message and declared that death does not have the last word. Hatred does not have the last word. Violence does not have the last word. Bigotry does not have the last word. Sin, evil do not have the last word. The last word is God, and God is love.

That's the Easter message, pure and simple. The last word is God, and God is love. God's love is greater than anything humans can do to one another. God loves us even when we turn away from God. And that is why we say that the Episcopal Church welcomes you, no exceptions. God loves you, and so we do, too.

In this part of the church that we call Trinity Cathedral, we know about the love of God. We know that it is greater than any differences we have among ourselves. We know that it commands us and compels us to take that love outside these old walls, to feed the hungry at the food pantry and clothe the naked at King's Harvest shelter and visit the sick among us and work for justice for all, including those who live at the margins through poverty or mental illness. The last word is God, and God is love.

If that sounds like a story you'd like to be part of, you're welcome to come back next week to hear more of it. Even more, you're welcome to join us as we go out into this world that so desperately needs to hear and feel the love of God. But whether you do that or not, take the presence of God that you feel this day, the love of Jesus coming to you in the bread and wine and in the people around you, and go out and make a difference in God's name. Then when Easter rolls around again next year, you'll have an even better story to tell.

[Easter Day: Acts 10:34-43; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; John 20:1-18.]