

Easter Sermon 2018
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**If anyone is in Christ,
there is a new creation:
everything old has passed away;
see, everything has become new!**
**All this is from God,
who reconciled us to himself through Christ,
and has given us the ministry of reconciliation;**
2 Corinthians 5

Today, I am going to tell you the secret to life. You probably already suspect what I am going to tell you, though you may not have thought of it as the “secret to life.” You probably suspect something about resurrection. About Christ’s victory over death. About newness of life. Or maybe you expect me to say something about the love of God in Christ. But these are not a secret. These are proclamation. The church’s official announcement. I like to think of these proclamations as notification! You see, on Easter Sunday, we’re putting the world **on-notice**. No matter how things appear, no matter what horrible, terrible thing is happening, no matter what your circumstance, God’s will and purpose for humankind and the world, is being accomplished. It’s only a matter of time. The wheels have been set in motion. “Take notice, evil spirits!” “Take notice powers and principalities that draw us from the love of God!” “Take notice!”

But, I haven’t really told you what the secret is, yet. Perhaps you remember a few secrets. When I was about 6 or 7, my mother told me one morning that she would tell me a secret if I ate my breakfast. All of it, that is. Like most of us (I assume) I couldn’t resist hearing a secret. I ate every last bite, swallowing the scrambled egg with extra milk to get it down. “Ok, I’m ready!” The secret she told me was, that there were two eggs on my plate instead of just one. “Eek!” (I’m still mad about it.) This is not the sort of secret I want to tell you today.

Although, some of us, have come today excited about the promise of an Easter egg hunt. I suppose an egg hunt is also about having a secret and sharing it. Someone does the hiding. And all the others try to discover the secret of where they are! My granddaughter's favorite game is hide and seek! Every night she leans against the wall... one. two. three. seven. nine. twelve. here-i-tom. (She's only two.) Perhaps, in every one of us, there is the desire to find and to be found—to discover, to seek after what we cannot see but suspect is there if we just know where to look! They say that the earliest form of faith is derived simply from learning to trust the people and circumstance around us. “When I look, will I find? When I hide, will I be found? What will become of me?!”

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran. She went to Simon Peter and the other disciple and told them what she had seen. They ran to see for themselves. Afraid to go into the tomb, the first disciple peered in and saw the linen wrappings. When Peter arrived, he went in and then the other followed. They saw the linen wrappings. They saw for themselves that Jesus was not there. And then, they went home, because they did not yet understand what was happening. Mary, alone, in the garden, was weeping. She spoke with angels. Messengers of God. But when she turned around, she saw Jesus.

One. Two. Three. Five. Eleven.....

Go, tell my brothers “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” “I have seen the Lord,” she told them.

The secret? Oh, yes, I said I was going to tell you a secret. Not just any secret, but the secret to life!

“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24).

So there you have it. Now you know. One of the remarkable and breath-taking things about the “March for our Lives” movement out of Parkland is that this student-led activism is evidence that there is something in the heart and soul of each of us, that can and will be tapped when “enough is enough”—“when the powers of death have done their worst.” There is only so much that we can take, before something within us breaks our hearts, breaks our silence and out pours courage and life-affirming power we had forgotten was possible— Out of the shadow of death comes remarkable spirit-led leadership —

“Take notice, evil spirits!” “Not one more.”

Students of all ethnicities, religions, and sexualities across the country are uniting. This movement truly has the mark and mission and focus of those who have been roused—risen— by the Spirit of God— God, who gives life and breathe even to those in the tomb. *Giving life and breath even to those in the tomb*, is a sort of secret, a pattern embedded in God’s creation, something we already know. but which seems to be hidden in plain sight. And we forget. It’s this secret of life—that gives today’s proclamation it’s footing, it’s grounding. Even though we have seen it, read about it, and experienced it, over and over— It’s a pattern of loss and renewal that runs throughout our lives and our world. Even if you’ve never thought of it as the secret to life, you’ve lived and experienced it, sometimes by choice and other times by chance. Either way it’s there as the ground of our being. It is the secret of life and the door into eternal life.

A few years back, a professor at The General Theological Seminary disappeared from the campus for over two months. We learned that his son had died and understood that he

was devastated. No one seemed to know where he had gone. Then, one night at dinner time, when everyone was seated in the rectory, he walked in the door. There was silence. “Friends,” he said. I have been to the bottom. And I have found that it is solid.” Perhaps we avoid the secret of life, and don’t speak of it often, because it comes with pain, real pain. Yet, because of it, we are changed. When we lose something we thought was life itself, we are forced to admit that we are not the creator, but only the creature... and must wait on God for what is next.

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We see it in the changing of the seasons, falling leaves. New buds and blossoms, and the setting and rising of the sun. The scriptures are full of stories of loss and renewal. Adam and Eve’s innocence died so that consciousness might be born. Abram left his country and kindred so that he might become a great nation, renamed Abraham, and be a blessing to all the families of the earth. Jacob lost his old identity and was wounded so that he could become a new man, Israel, with a new life. James and John left their boats and nets to become disciples of Jesus and fishers of people. (M. Marsh)

The most poignant of Jesus’ teachings was this—“The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again” (Mark 9:31).

“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies...”

The secret is out. It’s everywhere. It is a pattern of loss and renewal, It is a promise — of letting go and getting back, leaving and return, dying and rising. It’s at the core of our baptism and it’s what we declare every Sunday in the eucharist.

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

It's not coincidence that the Easter story is set in the context of the passover feast. Remember what this is about? The passover is the celebration of the Israelites' liberation from bondage in Egypt. It's about letting go, leaving behind, and dying to an old way of life and moving into a new life. It's about freedom and new possibilities. If you have come today to celebrate the resurrection of Christ, This is the lens through which we see Jesus. The promise. The proclamation. The announcement.

Like the Greeks who came to the disciples and said, "We want to see Jesus. We want to be in on the secret. We want to know this Jesus— who turns water into wine. Who cleanses the temple. Who heals the son of the royal official. Who heals the paralytic. Who feeds 5000 with a few loaves and a couple of fish. Who walks on water. Who gives sight to the man born blind. He raises Lazarus from the dead. Who himself, God raises from the dead? Isn't this the Jesus that you and I want to see? We who are lost and want to be found...

One. Two. Three. Five. Eleven.....

The disciples tell Jesus that about all the people who want to see him, and Jesus says to them,

"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

Sometimes we have no choice, except after the fact, after the loss— In these times, we are called upon to have faith, to trust, to let go. Other times we choose our losses and

deaths. We give up parts of ourselves for another. We practice this sort of faith. That we might be changed into the likeness of Christ, depending on God, being empowered by God, adjusting our beliefs and values so that we can be more available to others, and perhaps, more authentically ourselves.

There is no better time than now, Easter Sunday, to trust God. And to have faith in God's promises and dedicate ourselves to God's direction in our lives. There is no better reminder. No better pledge, than Jesus himself. He is the grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies so that we might bear much fruit.

I'll bet you a basket of Easter eggs, that one of those times when you let go, or when you had no other choice but to face what seemed impossible—I'll bet that in spite of the pain of it all, you knew, like Mary, that you had seen Jesus, that you heard his voice, that in the silence, you experienced the holy, and that you were absolutely convinced that God is present and working in your life. You thought you were lost, but you then you discovered you were already found. Mary will tell you—that angels do, in fact, bring messages of peace. And mysterious strangers come into our lives offering words of love and encouragement. New life and new ways of being arise.

“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit”

Never forget who we are or in whom we believe, for God is not done with us yet. Christ is risen! Do not leave here today without trusting the secret. The news is out! “He has been raised from the dead.” And we, with him. The earth quakes in new birth and celebration and joy as the seed breaks through in bud and blossom. These are all signs of

Easter Truth and Resurrection Reality. Live everyday as if it were Easter. Christ's resurrection is not a one day celebration. It is a Way of Life.

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