

“This Is Our Story”

John 20:1-18

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I'll often hear someone share a revealing, personal narrative, and conclude by saying, “That’s my story and I’m sticking to it.” As I worked my way through the Easter account in John’s Gospel this week, I found myself saying out loud, “This is our story, and we’re sticking to it.”

Ours is a story of hope and faith. It’s a story of steadfast love. It’s a story that begins in a humble manger with shepherds and livestock. It’s a story of healing and reconciliation and peace. It’s a story of lives transformed, lives reborn, lives uplifted. It’s a story where meaning is found in suffering, where redemption is found in sacrifice, where God’s grace moves from something we fantasize to something we can hold in our hands, something that is real. This is OUR story. And we’re sticking to it.

Mary arrives at the tomb early on the third day. The stone is rolled back. The tomb is empty. Peter and John come running and also find it empty; only a few burial cloths in evidence. Mary encounters a man she presumes to be the gardener, but when she hears the sound of his voice, “Mary,” she knows it is Christ, now risen from the dead. He is alive! He is alive to Mary! He is alive to the others! He is alive to you and to me. This is OUR story, and we’re sticking to it!

Mary becomes the first witness to the Resurrection. And there’s no way she can keep what she has witnessed to herself. She runs! No, she sprints to tell the news to the others! She is on fire!

She is alive in a way she's never been alive before. The fear of death is gone from her soul. The JOY of Resurrection is filling her bones and her body and her total self. She's got a story to tell to the world. It's HER story. And now, because we, too, believe, it's OUR story. And we're sticking to it.

Here's the thing I have come to understand about OUR story. Our Easter story is to be told, BUT, it is also to be lived. We are to live our lives individually and communally as Easter People. The story becomes persuasive when it is actually lived, when believers live with hope and live with faith and live with unconditional love. It's not enough to go and tell the story. We must OWN the story and LIVE the story.

For me, living the Easter story means being OUT THERE, rolling up my sleeves, looking for ways to bring hope to despair, joy to sadness, love to hatred, and kindness to coldness. This is why I love and respect South Church so much. It is our covenant to be OUT THERE being Easter people where we work, where we study, where we recreate, where we neighbor.

Jesus didn't have an office. I picture him more with a backpack and a walking stick. I picture him hanging out at the local jail, at the local rehab center, at the ambulance barn, at all the places where life is raw. I picture him striking up conversations with homeless people, with people in-line at the re-employment center, with people receiving a tough diagnosis from their oncologist. I picture him with the high school student whose homework has become overwhelming; with the middle school student whose getting bullied in the hallway; with the elementary school child who just doesn't seem to fit in anywhere.

Jesus has got a backpack filled with bandages and snacks and art supplies and prayer beads. He's got a walking stick that enables him to reach the hard-to-reach places. If you drive out to western Connecticut on a road that crosses the Appalachian Trail, you'll see a sign without any words, just a silhouette of a hiker with a backpack and a walking stick. That's the way I picture Jesus, "out there," where life is raw, bringing a little comfort, delivering a little hope, offering a little love.

This is what it means to be Easter people. Let's get our walking sticks out and our backpacks on. The world is waiting for our Easter joy, our Resurrection faith, our Christian love. We want the whole world to know we're Easter People, the ones living in the greatest of hope.
Amen!