

**April 21, 2019 Sermon for the Resurrection of our Lord, Year C
Easter Sunday
Pastor Carolyn Albert Donovan, Peace Lutheran Church –
Austin, Texas**

GOSPEL

Luke 24:1-12

The holy gospel according to Saint Luke, the twenty-fourth chapter.
Glory to you, O Lord.

¹On the first day of the week, at early dawn, [the women] came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. ⁶Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” ⁸Then they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹²But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

The gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

At the beginning of Lent, the season before this festival of Easter, we celebrate Ash Wednesday...where palms are burned to make ash that will mark our foreheads...as we are told, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Those ashes have called to me, even in the midst of preparing for a day as full of joy as this one.

There are ashes everywhere. Sometimes it can feel like the whole world is burning down. Or maybe sometimes, it just feels like the insides of us are hollowed out and charred by destructions that no one else can see.

That is certainly how Jesus' friends and followers felt as the sun rose that first Easter morning....hollow, aching, charred and raw.

And in our world today, from the Cathedral of Notre Dame to the churches of Saint Landry Parish in Louisiana – we walk among the ashes. This Easter, I have been called to ponder what we find there...among the ashes of where the world and our lives have burned.

I can think of at least four things that I have discovered in the ashes of our world and sacred story in these days.

First, among the ashes we discover how powerful the forces of destruction truly are. The chanting crowd from Palm Sunday scattered like dandelion seeds in the wind as soon as the empire rolled in to take Jesus away. What felt so powerful days ago, vanished dew burning off the grass.

All it took was a spark...and an ancient house of stone and light was crowned with flames that were almost unstoppable. Fire ripped through centuries of tender human creation without hesitation.

The forces of destruction are fearfully powerful.

The second thing I think we find among the ashes, perhaps even more unsettling than the power of other forces in the universe...is that we find how powerful we are. The crowds' chant of "crucify!" hangs in the air...and we realize how much harm we can do. We have felt our own power...and sometimes we find it in realizing that we can destroy things so easily. Sometimes we realize that when it is too late.

We are powerful. Powerful acts of hate can destroy so many things built in love. The churches of Saint Landry Parish burned because of the human power to destroy...not the random destruction of electricity happening to find tinder. Collectively we are finding we are powerful enough to burn the whole world. And the question remains – will we?

It is also among the ashes that we discover what has been strong enough to withstand the flames. The women in Luke's gospel amaze me. In their grief, they go out at dawn...to face the body of their teacher and friend and to care for him. There were those who were strong enough to stay at the cross beside Jesus and those who ran away. Many weren't strong enough to believe what the women said, when they came back with the gift of the news that Jesus was raised.

There are images of the cross gleaming in the chancel of Notre Dame...amid the blackened beams that fell all around it.

But the thing about that it...there was also priceless, fragile art destroyed by the flames that didn't claim that cross. There were lovingly made works of liturgical art in Saint Landry Parish that are lost forever.

And as we stand here today, we know that we have a crucified Savior. Even Jesus was swallowed up in death and destruction before this morning could come.

The things that are strong enough to survive the flames do not survive because they are more beautiful or more deserving or more good. It doesn't work like that.

There is one more thing that has come to matter to me very much. One more thing we find among the ashes. Sometimes resilience can look like self-indulgence...

I'll tell you what I mean...but first I need to tell you about Henry's Honey Farm. Henry's Honey Farm is in Red Granite, Wisconsin. It is the next town over from the cabin on a lake that I have visited for...basically my whole life. We go there to buy honey by the quart when we visit...sometimes chatting with Henry about what fields the bees are working these days...and sometimes just going into the empty front office and taking what we need from the shelves and leaving our money under a jar.

Last year I realized I could follow the farm on facebook. Which I love. They don't post often. But this past week, my feed contained frequent posts from them...shared in awkwardly translated French...from the beekeepers who help care for the three hives of bees that live on the roof of the sacristy. At first they knew nothing...Then, as time went on it became clear that part of the roof

hadn't burned. And the next day there was a post saying the first swarm had been sighted. The bees were alive.

I bring this up not only because I am especially grateful for bees this time of year...but because I've also learned about what bees do in a fire. Obviously, direct flames would kill them...but they survive smoke. When it gets smoky, they eat the honey stored in their hive and go dormant...they fall asleep.

I think the bees of Notre Dame teach us that sometimes our resiliency can come in eating a snack and taking a nap.

The disciples look pretty cowardly and unfaithful when they go lock themselves in a room after Jesus dies. But, you know, this year...I'm going to let them off the hook a little bit. They did the simplest things they knew how to do...and took care of each other. And that can be something we have to do when the powers of destruction come close.

More than anything, though, when we are wandering through the burned ruins of our lives or the world, we will always discover that Jesus is not where we might expect. He is not over and above the powers of evil. He is not using strength beyond what we can imagine to escape the harm that we inflict on him, along with all those he loves and came to save. He is not in the gleaming cross that survives the blaze...We find him among the beams of splintered wood. We find showing up even behind locked doors...among his friends as they try to care for each other and figure out what is next. And he will lead them into the next chapter...back out bravely into the world...as harsh as it can be...because the good news of God's love needs to be told to all those still lost in the ashes. The one thing that can't be touched by flames or floods or powers of destruction...the one thing we can hold onto through every other struggle and

blaze...is the love of God in Christ Jesus. Because it will go anywhere and endure anything...for the sake of each of us and the world God loves.

And so now, we hear the same message as those who came to the tomb: hurry, and go tell the world this good news...because as sure as anything, we are still making our way through the burned ruins of this world and our lives...and we need to know that we are not alone, not failures, and not without hope. Jesus has carried us through the flames...and brings us to life that is beyond hopelessness, suffering and death. Thanks be to God.