

Easter Vigil Homily 041722
Romans 6:3-11
Psalm 114
Matthew 28:1-10

I subscribe to an old Episcopal tradition wherein, during the season of Easter, every sermon starts with a joke. So, here goes.

The great detective, Sherlock Holmes and his very intelligent partner, Dr. Watson went on a camping trip. After a good meal and some quiet time, they lay down for the night, and went to sleep. Some hours later, Holmes awoke and nudged his faithful friend.

“Watson, look up at the sky and tell me what you see.”

Watson replied, “I see millions and millions of stars.”

Holmes asked, “What does that tell you?”

Watson pondered for a minute.

“Astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets.

Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo.

Horologically, I deduce that the time is approximately a quarter past three.

Theologically, I can see that God is omnipotent, and that we are small and insignificant.

Meteorologically, I suspect that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow.”

Then, Watson asked: “What does it tell you?”

Holmes was silent for a minute, then spoke.

“Someone has stolen our tent.”

Skeptics of Christianity often support their arguments with the statement like, “Even the Gospels disagree among themselves about what happened. So how can you believe?”

It is true that many details of the four Gospels differ – even in the most central story, that of the Resurrection. But this makes perfect sense because the way people see an event and then recount what they have seen is particular to each individual human being. For example, if four people are standing, one on each of the four corners of an intersection, and all four people witness an accident in the intersection, the four accounts of the accident will not match up perfectly – because of differing perceptions. But if you heard all four people describe the accident, there is good chance that they would agree on the central details of what they witnessed. The same is true of the Gospels.

As you all know so well, one thing that all four Gospels agree upon is: Jesus Christ rose from the dead after having been killed by crucifixion. I mean, after all, that is the central tenet of our faith. Without a belief in the bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ – the Easter event – there is no Christianity. But do you know what else all four Gospels agree upon – something that might be a little surprising? They all agree that the first witnesses to the empty tomb were women.

Throughout most Gospel accounts of Jesus’ ministry, all of the Disciples were referred to as men. For instance, in the Gospel we just heard, the twelve Disciples are listed by name in chapter 10. Matthew tells us that there were: “Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.” According to Matthew there

were at least 12 men who were in Jesus' inner circle. But who was there on that Easter morning?

We just heard the answer: "After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb." Here is the second thing that all of the Gospels agree upon: Mary Magdalene was the first person to witness the empty tomb. And in Matthew she is the first person to witness the risen Lord.

Jesus' life, death and Resurrection were truly revolutionary. He brought fullness out of hunger; hope out of despair; healing out of illness, and most importantly, life out of death. But one of the things that many people do not really think about much is: Jesus brought equality and justice between the genders out of an ancient system of inequity.

During His ministry, Jesus crossed over the gender norms of His time on many occasions. He redefined adultery, changed the rules of divorce, redeemed a prostitute and said many other things that showed men for the first time that women were beloved children of God, just as were the men. The fact that the Easter event was first revealed to Mary Magdalene – across all four Gospels is a very powerful statement. Mary Magdalene, who for years has been wrongly associated with the story of a repentant prostitute, as the first witness, makes it plain that Jesus found great value in all those who were overlooked and dismissed by society.

Jesus came into the world to save sinners. That is absolutely true – and the cornerstone of our faith. But His mission was not limited to that. As we consider the power

of the Resurrection, we should never forget that Jesus also came into the world to bring the message that ***EVERY*** person is a beloved child of God, regardless of gender, age, economic status, skin color, belief system, sexual orientation, gender identification, or any other criterion used to separate people.

God loves ***every one of us*** enough to send the only Son of God to a horrible death, in order to resurrect Him and prove once and for all – nothing can overcome the loving heart of the creator of the universe, as seen in the face of the risen Lord. Alleluia.

In the name of the God of all resurrections! Amen.