

COME, SEE, GO & TELL!
Easter, March 23, 2008 Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close
Grace Episcopal Church, Haddonfield, NJ

Greetings! Easter is our day to shout and rejoice! The world has been shaken by the miracle no one could have expected. God once again has done the unexpected! Nothing will ever be the same for us. Too many people thought that Good Friday would be the last word ... but God's answer to the "no" of Golgotha is a "yes" with the empty tomb. Now we move from darkness to light. Now we move from despair to hope. Now we move from death to life!

The Resurrection is the unexpected. The Good News that we share is that God wills us new life! Jesus' death is now replaced with his resurrection! God will not let death be the last word in his life, or in ours! So here we are! Gathered to celebrate the new age ... with joy ... with hope ... with life! Alleluia!

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the central event of the Bible. It is at the core of our faith. The Resurrection is foundational to who we are as a people, the Church. Out of the ordinary life ... the extra-ordinary happens. Ordinary people become the witnesses to God's miracle ... and life will never be the same for them, or for us.

This morning, we hear the Good News from Matthew's Gospel. In it we hear about the characters involved: Mary Magdalene; the other Mary; the guards; the angel; and, Jesus ... the Risen One. The key person in all the Gospel accounts is Mary Magdalene. She is the one woman who stands by Jesus in his ministry, at his death on the cross ... and now ... as the first witness to the Resurrection. Some people call her the apostle to the apostle. What is so rare about this is the place, or lack of place, that women played in the age of Jesus. But we have a new age ... people are in different places now. Mary is key to the foundational story ... it is her witness that launches the entire Church into existence!

The next character to note in the Gospel is the angel. The angel speaks to the women and reassures them, "Don't be afraid." In the midst of death, in the midst of the miracle, they need what all of us need ... reassurance to overcome our fear. The angel uses four verbs that become commands for the women, and for us, this day: Come; See; Go; and, Tell. Come see the empty tomb. See that the dead body of Jesus is no longer there ... He is raised from the dead! Go from this place, there is no need to linger around death ... God is about life. Tell the others what has happened!

The angel's words are for us too! Come with your doubts and fears and apprehensions into the presence of God. See that Jesus is God's answer to death and despair. Our God is a God of life, and that has been made known to us in Jesus Christ. Go from here, the shadow of death that lingers in the tomb and graveyard. There is no need for us to make our home in the darkness ... we are children of the light. And, finally, tell everyone you meet that God is doing something new in our lives. Share the story with all that you meet!

Perhaps many of you have noticed over the years that I use sign language during parts of the service. It is almost automatic for me. Let me teach you some sign language this morning: This is "Happy Easter!" (feeling fingers on the chest followed by hands in 'e' shape moved out); this is "come" (motion with hands towards the other towards you); this

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is “see” (use two fingers from eyes and move out); this is “go” (two fingers in g position moved out); and, “tell” (pointing finger from lips arched out). Most of my learning came from a woman in my last parish. Her name is Shelia Shuford.

Shelia was a remarkable person. She was a hearing person who in her teen years lost the ability to hear. Think about what that might be like. Consider a world where you can’t hear sounds any more ... not the voice of your child or lover, not the sounds of the birds this spring, note encouragement of friends. This is a dark world ... and the deaf know it only too well. It keeps them from jobs, from community, even from Church. It is a type of death that can be filled with fear, doubt, despair and more.

It would be easy to give up and remain lost in the shadow of deafness. That was not Shelia’s way. She is a person of faith. She decided to find a way to change the world, for both the hearing and deaf! When I first met Shelia, she was overseeing a service by which the deaf could make a telephone call to others. Think about how lost you would be if you couldn’t use your cell phones! Shelia’s service provided a place where the deaf could call using a special TTY device that typed in what they wanted to say. A hearing person at the service would make the call for the deaf person and verbally relay the message. In return, the same person would type back the response to the deaf person. Bingo! The miracle of communication occurred!

Eventually, this service was taken over by the telephone company. Shelia was out of a job! This didn’t stop her though. She was active in Church, prompted the needs of the deaf in Church and the rest of the world. She told her story and sought ways to make connections and community happen in the world. Shelia had come to the Church. She saw that something needed to be done to help connect people. She got the message to “go’ and “tell” by making the Good News available to people who didn’t have access to it. Shelia is now a deacon in the Church. She continues to live out the miracle of Easter in her own life and shares it with others.

I hear from Shelia every year. She always sends me a card (and this year a book on St. Patrick) around my birthday. Shelia and I are both March babies! She is one of those people that I see living out an Easter faith in the world. Shelia is one of the angels in my life and I give thanks for God’s gift of knowing her personally.

There is another powerful part of the story today. In Matthew’s Gospel, the women meet Jesus after the angel’s commands. I am struck by what Jesus says to them: Greetings! Don’t be afraid! Go & tell! Here our Lord speaks to the women, and to us. They are witnesses to the miracle of God ... and so are we. The word “greetings” carries with it the exurb ant salutation that is an expression of good wishes. No simple “hello” will suffice here. A greeting carries with it a profound sense of joy and well being!

Notice that Jesus also reassures the women. We humans need reassurance. The Good News is that God offers it over and over to us. Remember the angel? Jesus echoes the same words ... don’t be afraid! We are surrounded by those who would play upon our

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fears to manipulate and dominate us. But Jesus comes with a new word of hope ... and new word of hope. We don't have to be afraid anymore. God is with us in the person of Jesus. Not even death can keep us from God now. This fact alone should embolden us in our lives. We live in a new age!

Finally, Jesus speaks to the women and gives them their Easter mission. They are to "go" and "tell." Easter is not something that we are to keep to ourselves. Easter is God's word that is meant for the entire world. Remember the passage from Acts this morning? Peter learned that God's miracle and words are meant for everyone ... not just a few! The women go and share the Good News with the disciples ... and they are changed ... and we are changed! We too have the same mission. We don't have to change the world with our deeds. We aren't going to earn God's favor by the amount of works we accumulate. Like the women, all we are asked to do is to tell this good news to everyone we meet! We too are told to go and tell!

Easter is the miracle that brings us a new world and new life. We are called to live as Easter people. That means we will have new values and undertake new actions as Paul talks about in Colossians. We are a new people called to be centered in God and living lives that conform to the way of Jesus Christ. This will put us in conflict with much of the way the world wants. We are to have a vision that goes beyond that of the world's.

We have come here today to celebrate the great news and the miracle of Easter. But we are left with the words of the angel, and Jesus' own words ... to go and tell. How will we do that? In his book "Sources of Strength", Jimmy Carter talks about a Cuban pastor named Eloy Cruz. He observed that Cruz seemed to have a special touch with poor immigrants. Carter saw Cruz connect with person after person. He always had the right word to say ... just the right touch. People walked away from their encounter with Pastor Cruz a little stronger, a little more hopeful ... a little bit better prepared to face life's challenges.

Carter asked Cruz the secret of his success. At first, Cruz was embarrassed. But he thought for a moment and answered Carter's question. He said, "Senor Jimmy, we only need to have two loves in our lives. For God, and for the person who happens to be in front of us at any time." Easter is the story of God's love for us and the miracle of Jesus' Resurrection. We are challenged, no commanded, to go and tell the story to others. All it takes is two loves, the love of God and the love for the person standing before us. Let's live into the wonder and joy of this day. Let's share the good news of Easter with all we meet!

Greetings fellow Christians! Go and tell the world the Good News of the miracle of Easter! Alleluia!