

Sermons at St. Luke's

A homily preached by the Rev. Joseph H. Hensley, Jr. for the Easter Vigil, April 11, 2009.

Tomorrow is Easter Day, but tonight we came early to be the first ones to shout: Alleluia, Christ is risen! We came early to go ahead and welcome, through the waters of baptism, seven new followers of Jesus Christ. Many of those new followers are children, and I want to talk tonight so that they and all of us can understand what we are about. We came early so that we might be like those women in the Gospel lesson we just heard who got up before the sunrise. They were looking for the dead body of Jesus, but instead they saw an empty hole in the rock. "He is not here," says the angel. He has been raised from the dead." Why are we so excited? Why is "Christ is risen" such good news? Why is it so good that we get baptized and follow Jesus as our savior and Lord? Let me tell you a story.

Once a man was walking down the street. Only he was not paying much attention to where he was walking and he did not see an open sewer hole in the middle of the street. Suddenly, he fell into that hole. And now he was at the bottom of the hole. It was dark. It was cold. And it was stinky. The man was scared and alone. He called for help. One person passing by heard him and said, "Here, reach for my hand." But the man was not tall enough to reach. Another person passing by called down, "Don't you have a rope or a ladder or something down there?" "No!" answered the man in the hole, otherwise I'd get out of here. "Sorry," answered the person above. A third person heard the man in the hole calling for help. "Wait just a minute," he said, and jumped down into the hole! The man who had fallen into the hole was angry at first. "I wanted you to help me out of here, not get down in here with me!" The other replied, "Yes, I know. I came down into this hole precisely because I know the way out."

Sometimes we find ourselves in holes. Not real holes, but places that feel like a hole. Our hearts might feel alone, afraid, angry, covered in smelly stuff. Do you ever feel that way sometimes? It was not always like this. Do you remember the very first story we heard tonight back over in Johnson Hall? It was about God creating everything: light, heaven and earth, land and waters and on and on until there were people. And when God created something, God looked at it and saw that it was...good. God created everything to be good. The problem is that not long after God created people, people started thinking that they could get along without God. And when they started doing that, they forgot how good they were. And when they forgot how good they were, they started hurting and being mean to each other sometimes, and they would forget to share and help each other. They felt like the man who fell into the hole: stuck, scared, angry...and stinky. God still loved them, and God tried to help them remember how good they were, but the people were still stuck and stinky. That's what we call "sin." So God sent Jesus to be with the people, to be just like them, except that he was never stuck or stinky in his heart. He always showed that God made us good, because he was born of God. Some of the people who met Jesus could not believe that he came from God, and they tried to make Jesus go away by making him die and putting him in a hole in the rock. But on that Easter morning, when the women came to see his body in the hole, all they saw was an empty hole, because Jesus had been raised from the dead.

We shout "alleluia, Christ is risen," because Jesus is like the man in the story who comes down and gets in the hole to show the way out. We are excited to baptize new followers of Christ, because that means they don't have to stay in the hole any more. When we follow Jesus who was more powerful than death, we do not have to be stuck. We are joined to Jesus, who was greater than any bad things we can do, and he will lead us from being stuck to being free. When we enter the waters of baptism a spiritual rope is woven from those waters, and it is wrapped around our heart. And whenever we feel lost or stuck or stinky in our hearts, we tug on that rope,

and Jesus is on the other end. Put your hand on your heart right now and imagine that rope. We can ask for help, and Jesus is always pulling us back to God, out of the hole. Christ is risen! The hole is empty, and with Christ we will also be raised into the light of a new day.