

“The Unraveling of Certainty”

- Having raised both puppies, and being in the process of raising one little human being, with another on the way
 - One of the best games to play is the simple “hide the toy and see if they can find it.”
 - It’s a basic game that develops object permanence
 - The classic peek-a-boo with babies, who before they acquire this skill will truly believe you just vanished from sight- and are amused by it
 - Dogs are great too- according to this article I found on Psychology Today¹,
 - Dogs have about the same level of object permanence as a 1-2 year old human
 - So you have the toy, they are playing with the toy, you take it, and hide it under your leg, and watch them
 - They know it’s still there.
 - A smart dog will start the search immediately, walking around you, checking your hands
 - And soon nuzzling your leg to find that toy that suddenly went missing
 - This sense that an object is still there develops into a certainty as we get older
 - It becomes so automatic that we don’t think about it much
 - But it is still fun, you know, even as an adult, to have that certainty put into question
 - I saw David Copperfield just a few years ago, and seeing huge things on stage disappear, and reappear somewhere else
 - It was fun being surprised, having my certainty around object permanence undone and just for a moment entertaining the possibility of something impossible
 - And that was just a silly, matinée magic show.
 - My friends, this morning I have some good news, the very best news
 - It is not a trick, there are no mirrors, no slight of hand

¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/ulterior-motives/201802/dogs-and-object-permanence>

- God has done something that will unravel our certainty, and I hope make us question what is now possible.
- We begin this morning with the familiar story, this year from the Gospel of Luke
 - Our reading begins with the depressing certainty of death.
 - We find the faithful women disciples who had come with him from Galilee, which is no small distance
 - They had been with Jesus for a while- they most certainly saw him perform miracles
 - Witnessed that parade, or procession, into Jerusalem a week before
 - They watched in horror as he was arrested, tried in a mock trial, beaten,
 - crucified- capital punishment abused and misused to keep the status quo
 - They knew with certainty what this death meant, and it was not good for them or the other followers of Jesus
 - They had prepared spices and had come to the tomb to anoint a dead body, because death is permanent
 - Even when you look away, when you turn back, it is still there, and they knew it.
 - At least they give the body is proper respect at the very end, even if that respect was denied him while he was alive.
 - Rome knew it too, which is exactly why they crucified anyone who spoke of insurrection, anyone who dared to say that the Emperor is wrong
 - Anyone who might suggest that paying taxes to the Emperor should be questioned...
 - The faithful women disciples come to the tomb ready to see death.
 - “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” the angel asked... because he is dead.
 - When they ran back, they told the other disciples and they thought it was just crazy... an idle tale
 - That’s because... there is a certainty in death- it’s there even if we close our eyes and open them again.
 - Torture and crucifixion were effective tools in putting down rebellions and snuffing out crazy ideas of independence
 - It was effecting in keeping things status quo.
- But here we are this morning, some two thousand years later
 - Because what transpired at that tomb with those women disciples still matters

- This Jewish carpenter, who was hardly the only one at the time teaching against the Romans
- Was hardly the only one with a following who believed he would be the Messiah and overthrow the oppressors
- But this man, Jesus of Nazareth, changed the course of the world
- How did that happen?
- Because God unraveled the certainty that everyone took for granted
- That Rome's goto method of suppression did not work this time.
- You see, Jesus ended up on that cross because he did not waiver in telling us about God's love, and God's kingdom
- He ended up on that cross because he showed us what God's love is really like- it never gives up
- It will go through anything to reach us, even the cross will not deter it
- God decided that this is not the way the story would end, that in fact this divine love and care for God's creation was not stoppable.
- God took away the most powerful weapon of the enemy- fear, and terror
- And our certainty
- If Jesus' death was not permanent, what else are we wrong about?²
 - What other certainties need rethinking? What is possible?
 - This day has often been called by scholars as the Eighth Day
 - You remember the first 6, and all that God accomplished there, and then rested on the 7th
 - This is all a part of a much bigger story, even as it is a very significant part
 - God has been working for a long time preparing creation for this moment, this era
 - I wonder what God is going to create next, and I wonder how you and I can be a part of it?
 - God waits for us to join in with this new day of creating and saving.
 - God has opened up the possibilities for what the future might hold
 - And what God has revealed on this day 2000 years ago is that we, like Jesus, are not temporary people
 - Our lives are not summed up and ended the day we are buried- we too live on, and will one day see resurrection.
 - The thing we all live fearing is not what we believed it is
 - The death that was introduced into creation through Adam is now being repaired.

² PulpitFiction Podcast, Listened 4-16-19, <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/easterc>

- “Resurrection is God’s creative solution to the problem of [our sin] and death.”³
- Even after hearing this story every year of my life, even after preaching for 10 years, I will admit it is still sometimes hard to believe
 - Sometimes hard to let go of those certainties
 - The women at that tomb were perplexed, and then terrified
 - And then they ran back and told everyone, but it sounded insane
 - Only Peter was able to at least imagine another possibility beyond the obvious outcome of death and burial, and he went to take a look
 - If death is not the end, then what does that mean for us?
 - What does that mean for those we see around us this morning, and those we can imagine beyond the walls of this building?
 - That we go on, they go on, and that what we do for each other is the only thing that will last.
 - Maybe if we can let go of a little certainty, perhaps we can start wondering...
 - Maybe there is enough to go around
 - Maybe there is room for everyone
 - Maybe there is a way to hear the voices of the ignored without losing our own voice
 - Maybe showing love, compassion and understanding won’t bankrupt our hearts
 - Maybe that all of those certainties we have been taught and have come to believe-
 - Those that cause us to act out of self-preservation, selfishness, greed, and without any concern for another person...
 - Maybe those too need to be questioned- need to be compared to what God has said is truth.
 - It’s in the resurrection that God showed us what really matters, what will have the ultimate word
 - What cannot be defeated with violence and terror and scarcity
 - And it is the message that Jesus preached- that is what will live on
 - God raised Jesus from the dead, and then looked at us and said,
 - “See, this is what’s real, this is what is certain, now go and live like it.”
 - Live fearlessly and lavishly.

³ <http://www.pulpitfiction.us/show-notes/160-easter-c-march-27-2016> , [additional text added by me]

- Live knowing that what you do here on earth for other people will echo through eternity
- Live like what we do really matters
- Because it does.
- Every single time we impact another human being, for better or for worse, it will live on forever in them.
- If death is not the end, what other certainties should we start rethinking?
 - For the disciples, everything changed because of this fundamental assumption being shattered
 - They went from hiding, afraid, and doubting, to courageously telling the world about Jesus Christ, and his resurrection
 - About death being defeated.
 - What did they have left to fear?
 - And they went forth into the world, facing the threat and eventuality of death, because they knew it would not have the last word
 - They knew that the certainty of God's love, and the simple command to love each other like God loves us, was what would last
 - What certainties do we live with today ?
 - Do we see this life as short and sweet, and attempt to get everything we can before we die?
 - Or do we see in ourselves and each other the truth of what will last, of what is important, of what will stretch even beyond the veil of death?
 - What certainties is God unraveling for you today?
 - Because death has lost its sting.
 - Christ is risen. Alleluia!

Amen.