**Easter, April 5, 2015, Acts 10:34-43; Ps 118; 1 Cor 5:1-11;Mark 16:1-8; Rev. Mary Trainor**

Ever try to do something really difficult, way beyond what you think you are capable of doing physically and/or emotionally, but you just have to do it? When I was 16 years old, I paddled for my life in a wooden canoe that was being tossed in the air by 4 foot waves in the middle of a large lake during a fierce lightening storm. Maybe you have a story where you successfully did something that was seemingly impossible.

In our Gospel lesson today, three women went to the tomb very early that Easter morning to take care of Jesus' body with spices. This was the process used then to prepare a body for burial, when there were no funeral homes or embalming fluids. This process had to be done, but it had not yet been done because of the Jewish Sabbath rules. In order to do this task that they knew they just had to do no matter what (out of their love for Jesus), they had to roll away the rock blocking the tomb entrance. This was not some small stone, it was a huge boulder-estimated to have weighed from 2,000-4,000 lbs. Three women would not have been able to budge it, much less move it! They knew this, but they had to go -- they just were determined to honor Jesus in this way. So, they got to the tomb and low and behold, the stone was already rolled away. What a nice surprise! They could just go in there and gently apply the spices to Jesus' body and wrap the body. Maybe some strong guys saw them coming, and did this as a favor for them. But wait -- they looked inside and Jesus' body was not there! Eek- someone had taken Jesus' body - that is scary! They knew Jesus' body had been laid in there. Were there body snatchers? But just then they saw a young man (not Jesus) in the tomb -- and he spoke to them. He told them, "***Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified***. ***He has been raised; he is not here***....***go, tell his disciples....he is going ahead of you to Galilee, there you will see him, just as he told you***." We know, from other Gospels, that the women did tell the disciples and the risen Christ appeared to over 500 people.

At the beginning of this Easter Sunday service we said: "**Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen, indeed. Alleluia**." We also enjoyed singing the joy-filled hymn, "**Jesus Christ is risen today**." These are nice words: the Gospel story is an amazing one to hear. It is encouraging, hopeful to say "**The Lord is risen, indeed. Alleluia**." It is easy to say these words, on this special day of brunches and eggs and chocolate. The question is: do you mean them? Do you, deep in your heart, really and truly believe that Jesus died and rose? Do you believe in the resurrection, and that the risen Christ is with us today? The resurrection is the linchpin of Christianity; this is THE defining event.

We live in a culture that is enamored with crime shows, mystery stories, cold case movies. We are fascinated by forensics. I just heard that there is now an increase in the number of students interested in careers in science all because of the show CSI! This morning, I am going to tell you the story of a man who spent much of his professional life focused on crime. Back in the 90's, Lee Strobel was a big time crime reporter and lawyer for the Chicago Tribune. Because of his job, he had experienced all kinds of awful things on the streets of Chicago. He had heard it all and seen it all. Lee was also an atheist; he had no need for religion or God. Lee relied on solid evidence to believe something was true, and he just did not see any evidence for the resurrection. Year after year, Easter Sunday came and went, and it was just like any other day for Lee. Things went along fine until something happened: his wife became a Christian. This upset the apple cart, and so he decided to embark on an investigative journey: to disprove the resurrection. He figured, with his intelligence and ability to research, he would make quick work of helping his wife see the error of her newfound faith - and things would get back to normal at home. So he made a plan: he interviewed many experts: experts from theologians to physicians to philosophers; he came to each of them prepared, he asked questions, he gathered information. And then he processed the information he gathered, looking forward to proving to his wife and the world that the resurrection did not really happen. He explored all the different explanations that have emerged in the past 2000 years by people trying to explain away the truth of the resurrection: that Jesus did not actually die, that the body was not actually missing, that the witnesses to the empty tomb were not reliable witnesses, that Jesus was not seen after the resurrection but rather these sightings were only hallucinations. Lee was determined, single-minded, and confident. He finished his investigation and said this, "**Combined with the other evidence for Jesus, I concluded that he really is the one and only Son of God, who proved it by rising from the dead.**" One of Lee's most convincing pieces of evidence came in what happened after the resurrection: the disciples changed, and were now willing to die for Jesus (and many of them did). "**The disciples saw him, touched him, ate with him; they didn't merely believe in the resurrection... they knew it was true."** All of this is written in Strobel's books. He reports that the realization that the resurrection is true was "**the pivotal event of his entire life**."

C. S. Lewis once wrote: “**I believe in the power of the resurrection just like I believe in the sun, not only because I can see it, but because I can see everything else in its light**.” When we see the world in *the light of the resurrection* we see that, no matter what is going on in our lives, God holds us in the palm of His hand and His perfect love casts out all fear. When we see the world in *the light of the resurrection* we see that over everything is our living and loving God.

Yes, at the beginning of this Easter Sunday service we said: "**Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen, indeed. Alleluia**." We sang the joy-filled hymn, "**Jesus Christ is risen today.** The question you were presented with today was: Do you, deep in your heart, really and truly believe that Jesus died and rose? Do you believe in the resurrection? I pray that you do, because it is the truth. In a few minutes, we will recite the Nicene Creed - you have an opportunity to declare your faith in Jesus as your resurrected Lord and Savior. In a few minutes, you have the opportunity to meet the risen Christ in the sacrament of Holy Communion -- yes, Jesus shows up right here, in your hand. You all are invited to come forward, hold out your hand, and receive the real presence of Christ, who rose from the dead and is alive for you. Easter is pivotal for your life and mine, because as you see your life through the light of the resurrection you receive new life. Chose to live your life in the victory of Easter. **Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen, indeed. Alleluia Amen.**