

First of all, I want to say congratulations to Renea – who has come to the time she has been looking forward to for quite a while: the time of your profession of faith --- which is not an end – but only a new beginning to your life-long journey with Christ.

I welcome all those who have come to be with her and with the faith community of St. George to celebrate tonight. And wish all of you – a happy Easter. In however God led you here tonight – I am glad you are with us and hope you experience something in this liturgy which re-ignites the flame of faith in your heart – so you can leave here and boldly proclaim the good news of Easter by your words and actions. . .

At the foot of my mother's bed – is a cedar chest – given to her years ago by her parents as a hope chest.

So it was once filled with sheets and linens and I suppose pots and pans – all the things she would eventually need to set up her own household. All those things were taken out --- when her hope was fulfilled when she married my father in 1953.

That one-time hope chest is now a secure place for storing such things as photo albums, cast off baby blankets, war medals awarded to my uncles – and many other family treasures and heirlooms.

Whenever I go home, I spend as much time as I can – exploring our family's history by exploring that cedar chest. All of those precious items allow me to connect to those who have gone before me --- and gives me a sense of belonging.

As Christians – we spent some time tonight – a lot of time, really --- exploring our family's history by opening up our cedar chest – the Bible: both the Old and New Testaments. . .

We have listened attentively to the Word of God – in order to connect to those who have gone before us --- so that we can have a sense of belonging.

We have read and sung more from the Scriptures tonight – 9 different readings plus the singing of Psalms – then we normally read in almost a month of Sundays!

And when we read from the Scriptures -- we

always hear a very consistent message: **God loves us!**

Tonight, our cedar chest of readings from Genesis, Exodus, Isaiah, Baruch, Ezekiel, Romans, and Luke – span roughly 2,000 years of time.

At the very bottom of the cedar chest – is the second reading from Genesis telling us of Abraham's test from God which occurred some 75 years or so after Abraham was first called by God: placed historically by scripture scholars around the year 1,800 BC.

And the top layer of the cedar chest – contains St. Paul letter to the Romans written around 57 AD – right before he is taken in chains to the great capital city of the Empire. And the Gospel of Luke, probably reaching its final written form around 85 AD.

The point I wish to make is not the exact span of time covered by the readings – which leads some to estimate the age of the world ---

But my point is the *consistency* of the story line within this broad range of readings. . . The story that has repeated itself well over 2,000 years and will continue to repeat itself within our brief life span – and repeats itself in the very fabric of our individual faith lives.

That story line is:

In love, God reaches out to his people.

People respond to God's love.

People get distracted by other things and stray from God.

God doesn't give up and reaches out – a 2nd and a 3rd and a 4th time--in love. God never gives up on us!

The question that comes to my mind is: I wonder if God ever gets tired? Tired of you, tired of me, tired of all his created beings – who just can't seem to stay focused or committed to him for very long. . . and stray off on their own --- leaving home with their bags packed, always in search of greener pastures. . .

And that is an easy question to answer based on 2,000 years of writing: **NO**: God never tires of extending both his love and mercy – because God desires nothing more than to spend all eternity with each of his beloved creatures! And so God wants to connect with us – to claim our hearts as his own – and so reaches out again, and again, and again.

This is Good News! We follow a very strange God – a God who lavishes – *lavishes* – such extravagant love on each one of us. A get down on your knees God who does anything he needs to – so as to gain our attention AND to capture our hearts: A God who does not even withhold his own Son from us – allowing him to be crucified for our sake.

The one who embraced the cross – rather than shun it.

The one who willingly laid his hands upon the wood of the cross, instead of fighting it.

The one who willingly handed over his spirit – so that we might have that same spirit – pulsing within us.

Jesus' very spirit – who gives us life. Give us courage. Gives us strength.

And the best news of all – is that not even a tomb could hold Jesus – nor could a stone hold back God's love for us!

No, as the women who go to the tomb when the Sabbath is over find out – the stone is rolled away from the tomb **so that we could get in** and see that death has been robbed of its power!

The stone is rolled away – **so that we could get in** and see that a new world order has begun – so that we could see the truth of Jesus words: “destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up!”

The stone is rolled away – **so that we could get in** to see, and hear, and experience that by his cross and resurrection, Jesus has set us free. Free from sin. Free from death. Free from our old ways of doing and seeing things.

Free from all those things that may hold us back and distract us from following Jesus with all our minds and all our hearts --- and keep us from loving our neighbor as ourselves.

The stone is rolled away – freeing us from all those things that keep us locked up in **fear** – rather than reaching out heart to heart in mercy. . .

Yes, the tomb is empty!

And there is only one way of responding to such good news: *alleluia, alleluia – alleluia!*