

Scripture:

Psalm 145

Acts 10:34-43

Matthew 28:1-10

“Vindication.”

The greatest challenge at Easter is to be awestruck.

Just as on Good Friday we are called to behold --- not apprehend --- or understand ----- or comprehend ----- but behold the crucified Christ.

So on Easter we are called to be awe stricken --- breathless at the wonder of the empty tomb.

I’m convinced that there are fewer and fewer things that truly leave us awe struck.

For example ---- we can look down on our planet from space without ever leaving the comfort of our couch.

We can quickly --- very quickly --- type in a few characters on a computer keyboard ----- or bark out a few words at Siri and get almost any bit of information in mere seconds.

How far is it from Whitby Ontario Canada to Beijing China --- 10,564 kms - ----- O.K. ----- how long would it take to fly from Whitby Ontario Canada to Beijing China ----- flying from Toronto Ontario Canada to Beijing China --- 13.25 hours.

What was the very first game played in the NHL ---- the Ottawa Senators hosted the Montreal Canadiens on December 19th 1917 -----Montreal won 7-4 ----- 6,000 people crammed into Dey’s Arena in Ottawa --- on present day Laurier street --- it was listed to hold only 4,500 --- they were crammed in.

What is the oldest university in the world ----- the University of Al-Karaouine --- founded in 859 --- in present day Morocco.

And then more fitting for today ----- Where is the site of the resurrection? - -- Where is the tomb originally owned by Joseph of Arimathea --- the one

Jesus' body was placed in? ----- some say is it located in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem ----- others believe it is located within the grounds of "The Garden Tomb" a 2 acre oasis also in Jerusalem purchased in 1894 by Christians based in the UK who continue to maintain it as "The Garden Tomb Association."

In a way many of the factual things we sometimes wish to know about Biblical events are secondary---- it is the person of Jesus Christ that matters most --- and not geographical or physical locations of where He was ---- or wasn't ---- and what He did in this place as opposed to that place.

Seeking facts and only facts can very quickly erode away at any sense of awe that things can hold for us.

The more information we have at our fingertips ---- the more we seem to want --- remember Adam and Eve wanted more information too.

Limitations can be helpful --- without rules there are no games or sports --- only war.

We're not capable of handling everything ---- awe is sometimes healthy as Adam and Eve quickly discovered after being enticed by wanting more and more and more.

The greatest challenge at Easter is to simply be awestruck.

A theologian and preacher I respect very much --- Fleming Rutledge ---- said something recently in a lecture I attended to the effect that --- that the resurrection is the vindication of Good Friday.

The resurrection ---- is the vindication of Good Friday ----- the cross.

Easter --- is the vindication of Good Friday.

Easter as "vindication" --- what does that mean?

Well ----- vindication is ----- justification by proof.

Vindication is --- proof that someone or something is right --- reasonable --- or justified.

That's kind of what Easter is -- isn't it ----- the aha and hooray moment of --
 ---- "It's all true!" ----- "Evil lost ----- Good prevailed!" ---- Death isn't the
 final statement." ----- "God can do whatever --- and however God so
 chooses."

Vindication ----- Good Friday actually meant something more than just death
 ---- God was at work on the cross.

And of course this is all true.

God can do whatever and however God so chooses ---- God isn't limited by
 death --- death is contained within God --- death is all a part of God's plan.

Evil did lose ---- good prevailed.

Jesus lives.

He is Risen.

Behold the empty tomb.

But none of this should ever replace our sense of awe.

Our profound sense of awe.

My spine still tingles every Good Friday.

And my spine still tingles every Easter.

Especially Good Friday --- Easter too ---- but especially Good Friday
 because that is where it all goes down ----- Easter is kind of like the icing on
 the cake if you like.

I hope that never changes ---- I hope God continues to bless me with awe on
 Good Friday and on Easter.

I look around me ---- maybe it's just me --- maybe it's the same for some of
 us here today too ----- for many people Good Friday is just another day to
 clean out the garage ---- wash the car --- play football or baseball with their
 kids --- catch up on things often left for the week end.

And for many Easter is similar ---- just another Sunday --- just another day to sleep in ----- eat chocolate --- and not have to go to work --- maybe clean the house --- do laundry --- and so on --- a lazy restful kind of day.

And especially for Easter Monday --- it's just another day to do relax and enjoy not having to go to work --- a day to do things around the house --- spend more time with loved ones.

And of course all of these things are O.K. --- some even necessary and a few even admirable --- rest is necessary ---- Sabbath is helpful and faithful.

But without also some sense of awe ---- perhaps even a profound and deep sense of awe ---- we've missed the whole point of the 3 days ---- Good Friday ---- Holy Saturday ----- Easter Day.

We best find other days for all that other stuff --- these are God's days ---- they're meant for more than just self indulgence and self serving needs and deeds.

It isn't just --- "He is Risen." ----- pass the potatoes.

It isn't just ----- "The tomb is empty." ----- is there anymore gravy --- or mint sauce --- or whatever.

Easter often needs just a little more --- awe.

It's amazing ----- it's so powerful it's almost unbelievable ----- it most certainly is awesome.

And that is the centre of the day ----- a little wonder and awe --- along with the potatoes and gravy --- but maybe just forget about the Easter bunny.

And of course there's nothing wrong with ---- many of the other things that go with Easter ----- a great meal ---- and sweets and treats ---- resting and relaxing --- let's just not get so caught up in ourselves and what we like that God doesn't stand a chance at making an appearance.

There's nothing wrong with turkey --- ham ----- lamb --- chocolate and pie.

In our home this year it's going to be Chinese food --- or maybe Thai food we'll see ---- and of course there will be chocolate too --- dark Swedish chocolate the best kind if you ask me --- better than the Belgian even if you ask me --- although I'll eat that too.

But above these things --- not just mixed in with them --- but above them ---- lifted up and out from among them ---- there must also be some awe --- and some amazement.

God can do as God so chooses --- God is not limited by things of this world --- God is not limited by this world --- God is not limited by anything ---- and that is amazing --- and awesome ---- awe inspiring.

Everything of this world is subject to God --- including death --- including evil ----- even if we can't understand this and reconcile it with what happens in the world it is true.

Just because we cannot understand it doesn't mean it isn't true.

And so awe --- amazement ----- trust and ---- faithfulness.

There certainly would have been a profound sense of awe that very first Easter morning ----- we have the benefit of a few thousand years of reflection --- and we have the benefit of hearing from those who were first there.

Unfortunately sometimes this ---- "benefit" ---- knowing so much about it --- is also a handicap ----- as it tames the story and domesticates it without us even realizing it half the time.

Listen to some of the first Easter voices.

Pilate:

I washed my hands of it.

It was one symbolic action.

And as a politician I'm skilled at symbolic acts --- acts like shaking hands --- kissing a baby ---- waving to the crowds.

Symbolic actions are designed to make us feel as though we can control as many of the consequences as possible.

Symbolic actions like washing our hands --- freeing ourselves from something.

So I dipped my hands in a basin of water ---- swished them around --- and rinsed them thoroughly ---- then held them up dramatically ----- and dried them off in a symbolic gesture.

I made it clear --- at least I hope I did ----- I wanted nothing to do with this.

I washed my hands of it.

The guard:

I was told to watch the stone.

So --- I watched the stone.

I never fell asleep.

I heard some say that I must have fallen asleep --- but I tell you I was awake the whole time ---- I never slept.

So as I'm watching --- eyes on the stone the whole time --- fixed gaze --- focused.

So as I'm watching ---- something strange happens.

There are swirls of wind ---- colours of light ----- and then there are Angels ----- and the next thing I know the stone's been moved just like that.

I wasn't asleep ----- I'm a soldier --- I'm trained to watch without dozing --- and I am very good at it that's why I was chosen for this job --- because I've done it so well so many times before.

I didn't fall asleep folks --- not on my watch --- thank you very much.

Something amazing happened that's all that I know --- I've never seen anything like it before ---- and there was nothing I could do to stop it --- it was over before I could do a thing.

Mary Magdalene:

I went to the tomb ---- spices in hand.

But when I got there the stone had been rolled away.
And not only this but Jesus' body wasn't there --- it was gone.

I wondered who had taken it away ---- I was sad --- tears welled up within me.

Suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightening stood beside me.

They said --- "He is risen!"

And then I remembered Jesus saying to me ---- "The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners ---- be crucified ----- and on the third day be raised again."

And then I knew.

Then I knew exactly what had happened.

He had been raised just as He said He would be.

So I quickly ran to share what had happened with the disciples.
It was such a great relief --- confirmation even.

Peter:

I ran.

I remember running.

Running to the tomb where Mary had just been.

I felt as though I couldn't run fast enough.

I'm running --- and I'm running ---- and I'm running ----- and there is fear ---
---- and then suddenly there is also great joy.

And when I get there --- it's just as Mary said ----- the tomb is empty.

The stone is rolled away.
Strips of linen just laying there peacefully --- purposefully.

The tomb is empty.
Strips of linen just laying there.
He is risen.

Hallelujah ----- He is risen.

It was just marvelous --- I'd never seen or experienced anything quite like this before.

And of course these are just a few of the folks who were there.

It's Easter ----- it's awesome.

It's Easter --- and it is very real.

It's not just a metaphor for renewal --- it happened --- we'll all see one day -
-- from a different perspective --- we'll all be changed and in the twinkling of
an eye.

Some of us will be relieved and excited --- awestruck.

Others will be terrified saying or thinking --- "I had it all wrong --- it is true -
----- I was such a fool."

It's Easter ----- all is new --- He is alive and well.

It's Easter --- all is well in the world --- God is good ----- He is Risen --- the
tomb is indeed empty.

It's God's day once again ---- and so we celebrate and eat --- feast even -----
----- gathering together ---- from far and from wide --- with family ---- and
friends ---- some of us believers ----- some of us doubters ---- some adamant
it happened --- others not so much maybe.

Either way it's God's day.

God's awesome day of vindication.

Easter cannot be watered down ---- reasoned out ---- or intellectualized.

Break out the feast --- bust open the chocolate.

Gather around together ----- be awe stricken.

It's bigger than just all the things we mark it with --- it's so much bigger than just food and people and chocolate.

It's worthy of all of that and so much more.

It's just awesome.

Hallelujah Christ is Risen.

Hallelujah the tomb is empty.

It's God's day --- and He decided to do something that really got people's attention --- and still does today.

It's really awesome ---- vindicating even.

Hallelujah Christ is Risen.

Hallelujah the tomb is empty.

And Hallelujah ---- the story continues.

God's great love story --- and rescue plan continues.

Hallelujah He is Risen ----- and Hallelujah ----- He will come again.

Amen.