

The Sunday of the Resurrection, April 21, 2019
“The New Clothes We Forget to Bring”

ST. THOMAS' EPISCOPAL CHURCH

ST. PETERSBURG, FL

Acts 10: 34-43 • Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24 • Colossians 3: 1-4 • Luke 24: 1-12



Happy Easter, everyone! It is great to see you here today on this the holiest of days, and I welcome you whether you call St. Thomas' your church home or whether this is the first time you've been with us. We're glad you're here. We're glad you're here not only because this is a great day to spend with family and friends, not only because this is a great day to spend in worship, not only because we've got such a special service and such great music for our celebration today. We're glad you're here not only because of all those great things but first and above all, because today is the day that we celebrate love beating death, good conquering evil, Jesus Christ rising from the grave. We're glad to be here today because the tomb was empty, and our Savior reigns, just as he said he would and just as all his early followers believed. Isn't that right?

But you wouldn't know it from the opening verses of Luke's resurrection account, would you? Take a look again. "They came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared." Those would be the spices used for the anointing of a dead body. If we look at John's gospel, it tells us that when Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus claimed Jesus' body, they wrapped it in a linen cloth with about 75 pounds of spices, specifically myrrh and aloes. Now, that's a lot of spices, 75 pounds. And that was only on Friday, and today's Sunday, and here are the women bringing more spices. Why? The spices were to cover up the odor of a decomposing body, which was seemingly potent enough to need spice reinforcements only a few days after burial.

They didn't bring Jesus a fresh change of clothes and some new sandals. They didn't bring him a meal and a jug of wine. They didn't bring him a bar of soap and a clean towel. They didn't bring him anything that you might expect a person would need after being shut up in a cave for three days after a bit of

torture. No. They brought anointing spices because despite all the things Jesus had said about this moment, despite all the times he had shared with them that after three days he would rise again, in the end they had not believed him. In the end, resurrection was just too far-fetched.

I wonder, how many times have I come to church and brought anointing spices with me? How many times have I come here, faithfully, dutifully, joyfully even, but carried anointing spices betraying the sad truth that I really didn't expect anything different? That I really didn't expect to be changed. How many times have you? Don't get me wrong, I don't say that to chastise. Not at all. But rather, to say that we, you and I, are in good company. Nobody expects the resurrection, not even Jesus' closest friends. Nobody expects to be changed by what they know they'll find at the tomb. Except that isn't the way that it went. It didn't go the way anybody expected. It went the way Jesus said it would. And the lives of those women, and then the lives of those disciples, and then the lives

of all those who would follow Jesus thereafter were changed, forever. The rest of their story was different because of the Resurrection. The rest of your story can be, too.

Over a decade ago, I had the chance to serve on something called a Kairos team. Kairos is a prison ministry and as a part of the team, I was among those who went to a maximum-security men's prison to minister for a weekend. It was actually pretty scary for me at first. But towards the end of the weekend I had seen first hand how the power of resurrection, how the power of love, God's love, can change lives from what we expect into what we'd never expect. There was a time when the men could speak to the whole group, say anything they wanted to say. A couple of the usual suspects got up and talked. But then this one guy stood up, and you could tell that no one expected him to stand up and talk. He was a big guy, kinda mean looking, a lot of the other men were afraid of him. Everybody sort of thought he was the type that was just there for the food –

see, on these Kairos weekends, the men who participate get cookies and pizza instead of prison food. It's considered a big plus. So much so that there's always a few who are really only there for the food. Everybody thought this guy was one of those. So he stands up to speak, but he doesn't say anything. Not at first. Then he lifts his hand and brushes something out of his eye. I won't tell you it was a tear because I don't want to think what it might have cost him there, in that place, to cry in front of other men. When he spoke, his voice was surprisingly soft. He said, "I'm tired. All my life I've been the biggest. The meanest. The baddest. And I'm tired of that way. I'm ready to try something new. Maybe this Jesus, maybe this is it."

I don't know where his story took him next. I don't know if he gave up his old ways for a time, forever, or even at all. What I do know is that the power of love, the power of God who raised Jesus from the dead, that unexpected power, got a hold of him that day and showed him a possibility he never before

imagined. For at least that moment, that man could see himself bathed in the light of Christ and it opened him up to be able to see a reality that had always been there, but to which he had been blinded.

What if we stopped carrying anointing spices around with us? What if we stopped showing up with spices used to bless the power of death and instead started showing up expecting the power of life and love? What if we started carrying new clothes with us so that whenever, wherever, in whomsoever we meet the Resurrected Jesus we have the right thing to give them? What if we put on those new clothes ourselves? What if we started expecting Jesus, risen and alive, everywhere we went?

I don't know where your story takes you next. I don't know if you'll stop carrying anointing spices around with you for a day, for a season, forever, or even at all. What I do know is that the power of love, the power of God who

raised Jesus from the dead, that unexpected power, is alive and is here and is now, as it ever has been. Maybe it'll get a hold of you. Maybe it'll show you a new possibility you've never before imagined. Maybe, in this moment, you can see yourself bathed in the light of the Resurrected Christ, and maybe you can leave your spices, and put on your new clothes.

Amen.