

## Sermon – “In-Tune with God” – Easter 2018

Grace and Peace – Pause and Reflect – on the sounds around us – those gathered near and those who are far away.

Over the years I have read this story in a number of places, the last being on Facebook a few years back – this story has turned into what many may call a “Modern Day” Parable – the purpose of Parables was for Jesus to use a story to teach a lesson. The factual data wasn’t as important as the meaning gleaned from the story and application for daily living. As you listen to this modern day parable – do your best “gleaning” and discover what meaning you might find in this story.

Pastor Jeremiah Steeppek transformed himself into a homeless person and went to the 10,000 member congregation which he was to be introduced as the Head/lead pastor that Sunday morning. He walked around his “soon to be church” for about 30 minutes while it was filling with people for the first service....only 3 people out of the many people attending worship that Sunday said hello to him. As people were filing in he asked people for money or any change to buy food...but NO ONE in the church gave him anything. He said good morning to people only to be greeted back with stares and dirty looks, with people looking down on him and judging him. He then went into the large sanctuary and sat down right in the first row in the front of the church, and was asked by the ushers if he would please move to the back of the Sanctuary. As he sat in the back of the church, he listened to the church announcements and other details of this busy suburban congregation – they had things going on.

When all that was done, the elders went up and were excited to introduce the new pastor of the church to the congregation....."We would like to introduce to you Pastor Jeremiah Steepek" ....The congregation looked around clapping with joy and anticipation.....The homeless man sitting in the back stood up.....and started walking down the aisle.....the clapping stopped with ALL eyes on him....he walked up the altar area and took the microphone from the elders (who were in on this) and paused for a moment....then he reminded them

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' - 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' After he recited this, he looked towards the congregation and told them all what he had experienced that morning...Today I see a gathering of people, the world has enough people who gather, but not enough disciples...we are called to be disciples.

In our Resurrection Gospel we hear this interaction between Mary and the Risen Jesus in verse 15: "He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." Then she realizes who She is speaking with – Jesus – my Teacher and my Lord." How amazing it must have been for Mary when she realized in her grief with whom she was speaking!

I have never been mistaken for the gardener, but I have been mistaken for the custodian. At my first my parish right out seminary the youth group, their parents and myself were getting ready for the big Easter Breakfast Fundraiser that was done every year, which meant there were lots of eggs that needed to be cracked and pancake batter to be mixed up to serve the 1000 or so people who would be attending this Easter Breakfast. With preparation came problems, one of the sinks was plugged so of course that meant that the pastor had to take care of it. Right in the middle of plunging someone buzzed at the front door of the office area, being the only staff person and adult at that time I took a break to answer the door, plunger in hand and sweat running down my much younger face. The person at the door had a special delivery from his grandmother, a member of the Congregation – for each of the pastors – there were 3 – remember it was MN and this Congregation was about 3,500 members – this young man wondered if any of the pastors were around or maybe I could as the custodian leave these delivery of 3 beautiful plants – 1 for each of the pastors in the pastor's offices. Without correcting this young man, I said sure, I will make sure it is taken care of and he was on his way. The next day – Easter Sunday – he happened to be in my greeting line and apologized for the mistake he made, he just assume because of the plunger and the way I was dressed that I was the custodian. I told him not to worry; honest mistake.

Looks can be deceiving – for Mary in her distress and grief really wasn't expecting to see Jesus, the gardener made more sense. She had heard what the others had heard – the promise of Jesus that he would be raised on the third day by the power of God, but would that, could that be? The people in the congregation in the opening story expected something different or

someone different when they imagined their new pastor. What we imagine is often different than reality.

Parables of the Resurrection are all around us every day but are we aware of them – do we seek them? The opening story, is a wonderful illustration of how we overlook God in our midst, of not being “In-Tune” with God or even ourselves sometimes – it requires awareness.

God is in our midst – are we “In Tune” with God or are we more distracted by the details of life and the outer package of the people we meet and our perceptions? Mary didn’t expect to see the living amongst the dead and when she realized what happened she went to tell the others, would they believe her? Would you?

I find it interesting that Easter is April 1<sup>st</sup> this year – I really don’t do “April Fool’s Day” very well. I don’t pull pranks or tell jokes that catch people off guard. In some of the reading I was doing for this Sermon, I saw an overarching theme – “Easter was God’s April Fool’s Joke on Death.” The Resurrection of our Lord, the empty tomb is God’s way of saying that death doesn’t have the final say, that in Jesus there is life beyond death, his death wasn’t contained in the tomb of this earth. Death doesn’t have the final say – God does – Easter is that final say in the Resurrection to eternal life and life here and now.

Did you know that the term Easter isn’t even a Biblical word but a word acquired from the pagan festival for Spring time? The feast day of Easter was originally a pagan celebration of renewal and rebirth to honor the pagan Saxon goddess Eastre. When the early missionaries converted the Saxons to Christianity, they assimilate the holiday too which fell around the same

time as the memorial of Christ's resurrection from the dead. This "Merger" became known as Easter/The Resurrection of our Lord.

This is a season of New Life – In Christ we are New Creations (book marks) New life is a challenge for humans because it references CHANGE and Change is NOT ALWAYS welcomed and MOST OFTEN resisted – even GOOD change. There is a poster at the gym where I go: "if there never was change we wouldn't have butterflies." I like the simplicity of that symbolism of New Life. I reference butterflies often because they need to go through a metamorphosis from a little worm before they can fly. The caterpillars don't decide to change it happens, I guess they could resist but that doesn't seem likely. We do though and resist our own possibility of metamorphosis. The empty Tomb of Jesus is about New Life for us – it happens whether we realize it or not – Growing Spiritually is about "tuning-in" or being "In-tune" with God, who calls us to grow into the wholeness in which we are created. This is what the Resurrection Story is all about – being "In-Tune" with the God who stands right in front of us each day in our neighbors and situations of life! May you be blessed on this most Holy Day – to make each Day a Holy Response to God – Aware and "In-Tune" to God in our Midst – Amen!