

Sermon Draft

Text: Matthew 28:1–10

Sermon: Easter 2023 “Golden Dancing Slippers”

He is risen; he is risen indeed! Alleluia!

All would be for naught if it weren't for Christ's resurrection from the grave. All the Church's celebrations—Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, and Lent would be incomplete without their glorious culmination in Christ's resurrection from the grave. Any fractioning of Jesus' life from conception to resurrection, of course, is impossible. The divine Man is one, and all that he did, his whole life of good works is one spectacular, glorious, and gracious work directed toward his own to the glory of his Father.

The Church Year is then a glorious unfolding of the seamless tapestry of God's redemptive work in and through Christ. The Church sees this festival day not only as culmination of the recollection of Christ's resurrection, but also as the absolute certainty and ongoing victory over the grave on her pilgrimage through this present life. Her certainty is based on Christ's real existence and enlivening work in and through the Word and the Sacraments.

The pastor is the sent messenger of Christ, who invites all to come and see and then to go and tell. The Church carries the message of Christ to the world.

He is risen; he is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The grave is empty; the tomb is vacant. Scripture tells us so. This is the angel's proclamation. No dead body is in that carved-out cave!

But what does this mean? What does an empty tomb mean for you and me on this most glorious day of the Church Year?

There they were. They were out of place sitting there. But there they were, dancing slippers! And they were gold, golden dancing slippers! Why were they there inside the doors of the church?

Golden dancing slippers are golden dancing slippers. But a story is behind them. They belonged to Aggie and a member of the church. Aggie had suffered polio, and later in her life she was mainly confined to a wheelchair.

This day, the day of the golden dancing slippers, was the day of her funeral. Larry, her husband, placed the golden dancing slippers right there in the narthex on top of Aggie's wheelchair!

Everyone knew what the golden dancing slippers preached. Aggie always said she couldn't wait to get to heaven and finally dance! She was confident that she would dance, since her Savior had been sacrificed on the altar of the cross as blood payment for her sins. He had risen from the grave on the third day, marking the Father's satisfaction. And his tomb was empty!

Golden dancing shoes are golden dancing shoes! And there was a story behind it. The empty tomb is an empty tomb, but oh, what a story lies behind it! We could say this morning that there is an empty tomb, and we can believe that with our heads—some kind of intellectual agreement but that is not the intent of the angel and, therefore, of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God sent an angel that day of the resurrection to point the women to an empty tomb. But that empty tomb preaches far more than a mere absent body of a man born in Bethlehem! The empty tomb preaches the fulfillment of all of God's promises of salvation directed to his own people.

The empty tomb preaches the completion of the Father's plan to provide a way back to him. The empty tomb preaches the absolute truth that death God's set wage for all sinners has now lost its sting (1 Corinthians 15:55). The empty tomb preaches that the old creation is over and that the new creation has already begun in Christ by his victorious death and resurrection.

God preaches through Isaiah: ***“He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth”*** (25:8). Again, in Isaiah, God preaches: ***“He poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors”*** (53:12). And the Bible records Jesus' words in John's Gospel: ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life”*** (5:24).

The empty tomb preaches what the Scriptures preach: death is done, death is over, and death is no more because of Jesus, God's Son. Jesus' resurrection makes death and the grave miniscule for every believer. The empty tomb preaches this. Do you believe this?

The women were stunned at the angel's preaching. They could hardly take it all in. You would be too if you had seen the bloodied and shamed Jesus three days earlier hanging above the earth on a cross, and then for the women to comprehend more fully what this all meant! But the Lord had the angel sit on the very stone that had sealed the tomb. The angel's posture on that very stone that had closed the tomb preached a loud sermon to the women, reinforcing the oral Good News, saying, "All is well; death is defeated, Jesus is alive, the grave can't hold you in." All is well for you, people of God. The empty tomb is empty.

That means your tomb is empty. That's what Aggie would tell us if she could be here today, I would suspect. That's what her golden dancing slippers were preaching—and still are! On her funeral day they preached a nonverbal sermon that was louder than the sermon I preached from the pulpit.

Paul preaches the same reality of the empty tomb in our Second Reading. He points out the biblical truth that they are already “*seated at the right hand of God,*” having been raised with Christ (Colossians 3:1). By splashing water on you and speaking his name at your Baptism, God placed you already in heaven beyond death, the tomb, and this life. There you are dressed in white robes, singing unending praises to the Lamb who was slain. Every believer’s sin, death, filthiness, and shame are roadkill, viewed through the rearview mirror! We are already on the road to heaven; no, we are in heaven!

This glorious resurrection text is not merely the Lord’s message to the women, and then by extension to the disciples. The resurrection story is for us too. We see ourselves there at the empty tomb. We are at the feet of that first white-clothed Easter preacher. He is not here, see He Is Risen!

And then we depart a little confused only to run into Jesus himself. He greets us graciously, and oh, so tenderly. “Greetings!” We hug Jesus, falling on our knees, worshiping the very One who owns us by his blood, who holds nothing against us.

Today the Risen One is no less present as this white-clothed Easter preacher points us to his empty tomb, to his risen body and blood in the bread and wine given to us in the meal of immortality. Jesus greets each of us in words that speak of pardon, grace, and comfort, and then he, now as then, directs us to go tell others. He directs us to strengthen one another with his Good New. Go tell all, as he told his disciples at the end of Matthew's Gospel. With his tomb empty and ours one cannot help but speak to everyone by the Spirit's power of him who is our very life!

Golden dancing slippers! Oh, do they tell a story! They tell his story, the empty tomb, the Father's pardon, the risen Christ, sins forgiven, death defeated, and all is well. No more fear for those who are his.

He is risen; he is risen indeed. Alleluia!