

Sermon for Easter 2016 – “Stealing Easter”

Year C – Texts: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; John 20:1-18

One Sunday school during Lent a teacher asked her class what she thought was a very simple question: “What is Easter?” One of the students replied, “Oh, that’s easy. “It’s the holiday in November when everyone gets together and eats turkey.” “Wrong,” said the teacher. Another child replied: “Easter is the holiday when we put up a tree, exchange presents, and celebrate the birth of Jesus.” “Wrong,” said the clearly frustrated teacher. Who then turned to the class and asked: “Does anyone know what Easter is?” “I do,” said one little boy. “Easter is the Christian holiday that coincides with the Jewish feast of Passover. After eating the Last Supper with His disciples, Jesus was betrayed and turned over to the Romans. He was hung on a cross and died... Then He was buried in a cave which was sealed off by a large boulder.” The teacher smiled broadly with delight. The child continued: “Every year the boulder is moved aside so that Jesus can come out... If he sees his shadow, there will be six more weeks of winter.”

In considering what to say this morning I came across something that I wanted to share with you. It’s a poem and the author is Gary Brice.

Every Who down in Who-ville, liked Easter a lot...
But the Grinch, who lived just north of Who-ville, did not!

The Grinch hated Easter, the whole Lenten Season,
And if you’ll be patient, I’ll tell you the reason.

It could be his head wasn’t screwed on just right.
It could be, perhaps, that his shoes were too tight.

But that wasn’t the reason he loathed with such might.

The Grinch hated Easter, alone in his cave,
‘Cause his heart was as dead and as dark as the grave.

So he stood there, on Good Friday, and he pictured the scene,
Of Easter in Who-ville and all it would mean.

They would rise with “He’s Risen” on each pair of Who lips,
And they’d dress for church services and after church trips.

“They’re rehearsing cantatas and pageants and prayers,
They are ironing their clothes and they’re curling their hairs.”

Then he growled, with his Grinch fingers nervously drumming,
“I MUST find some way to stop Easter from coming!”

For on Easter he knew, all the Who boys and girls,
Would have much more to think of than fashions and curls.

They would think of their Savior, and all girls and boys,
Would open their Who mouths and make joyful noise.
And that’s one thing he hated, the Noise, Noise, Noise, Noise!

Then the Who’s, young and old, would fold hands and bow heads,
While prayers of thanksgiving and worship were said.

Then they’d sing about Jesus, how He died, how He lives,
Then some windbag would talk on the hope that He gives.

And then they'd do something he liked least of all,
Every Who down in Who-ville, the tall and the small,
Would stand close together, with Easter bells ringing,
They'd hold hands in a circle, and they'd pass Easter Greetings!

"Christ's peace be with you," they'd say to their brother,
"The Lord bless and keep you," they'd say to each other.

And the thought galled the Grinch from his hat to his shoelace,
And a frown seemed to darken each part of his Grinch-face.

"Why, for 50 some years I've put up with it now!
I must stop this Easter from coming...but how?"

Then he got an idea? And awful idea!
The Grinch got a wonderful, awful idea!

"I know just what to do," the Grinch said with a hoot,
And he made a quick pair of Bunny ears and a suit.

And he chuckled and clucked, "What a great Grinchy trick!
With these ears and this suit I can steal Easter...slick!"

He dyed baskets pink and filled each with fake grass,
Then he set one aside for each Who-lad and Who-lass.

Then he went to the Wal-Mart, charged his card to the max,
Spending thousands on chocolates, not counting the tax.

Then he bought fancy bonnets and gaudy bow ties,
And he grinned as he pictured Who giggles and sighs.

"This will keep them from praying and singing those songs,
This will please and distract them for all the day long."

Then he loaded the goodies and baskets and clothes,
The bonnets and dresses and ties that make bows,

And he packed his mini-van 'til it threatened to pop,
And he grinned as he mumbled, "This Easter must stop!"

Then long after midnight, with each Who in his bed
While thoughts of Sweet Jesus filled every Who head,
The Grinch left for each as they finished their nap,
A sweet basket of candy, a distraction, a trap.

He smiled his Grinch smile as he tiptoed away,
And he pictured the mess he would cause the next day.

He pictured the Who's rising and finding their stash,
And forgetting about Jesus in less than a flash.

They would fight over chocolates, over bonnets and toys,
They'd forget about praying and making glad noise.

"We can't get them dressed" would shout Who dads and moms,
"They're covered with chocolate from their nose to their thumbs.

"From their heart to their heads they're absorbed with themselves,
We'll have to put Easter and such on the shelves!"

The Grinch hardly slept as he waited the dawn,
He could not stop imagining the fight that would come.

“Pooh-pooh to the Whos” he was grinch-ish-ly humming,
“They are finding out now that no Easter is coming.

“They are just waking up. I know just how they’ll be!
Their mouths will hang open, a minute or three,
Then the Whos will all shout, “Easter’s all about ME!”
And they’ll forget all about the Carpenter from Galilee.

The Grinch cocked his head, put his hand to his ear,
“That’s a noise,” grinned the Grinch, “That I simply must hear!”

And he did hear a noise rising over the meadow,
It started in low, and it started to grow.

But the sound wasn’t selfish or angry or sad,
It just couldn’t be so, but the sound sounded glad!

He stared down at Who-ville and the Grinch popped his eyes!
Then he shook! What he saw was a shocking surprise!

Every Who boy and girl had their chocolates and bonnets,
But every Who face had a peaceful smile on it!

They had their bow ties and their chocolate treat basket,
But the Grinch had a question and he just had to ask it.

“Why aren’t they distracted and selfish and rude,
Why aren’t they absorbed with their dresses and food?

Could it be that they’ll sing whether chocolate or not;
Could it be I don’t understand Easter one jot?”

What happened then.... well, down in Who-ville they say,
The Holy Spirit got hold of a Grinch heart that day.

The heart that was empty, and gloomy, and cold,
Became warm and alive, filled with promise untold.

And Jesus, who had been to the Grinch just a bother,
Became Savior and Master, Redeemer and Brother!

Easter is more than just trappings, all Who-ville agreed,
It’s a Savior who lives to meet every man’s needs.

They made their Who circle in the First Church that day,
And after their singing, they started to pray.

“Christ’s peace be with you,” said one to his brother,
“God bless you and keep you,” said one to the other.

“He is Risen,” cried one in the midst of the blessed;
“He is Risen indeed,” said the Grinch with the rest.

It’s been passed down as fact, or so the Whos say,
That the singing was louder by threefold that day.

And the circle seemed fuller, more warm and more sweet,
Two green, hairy Grinch hands had made it complete.

Wow – silly, old Grinch – didn't he learn his lesson at Christmas? Why would he think that he could stop something that important from happening? But...what if he **had**? What if the Grinch stole Easter? If Easter had never happened, how would it affect you? Personally, I think life would be very different if Easter had never taken place. For one thing, we'd have no hope for the future, or any chance for redemption. But, what if? What if, on that early Sunday morning, Mary arrived at the tomb and found our Lord lying in that tomb?

In our first reading, Paul plays a very disturbing game of “what if.” He paints a picture, showing us what our lives would be like, and what would change if the Grinch had been successful. You see, everything we believe, absolutely everything, hinges upon the pivotal act of Christ's resurrection. But, Paul says, all this is in vain if Christ hadn't risen. Without the resurrection, the Christian faith has no foundation. Everything we've believed would've been exposed as a lie. Without Easter, it wouldn't matter what, or in whom, we believe. That's what sets us Christians apart, our Savior is alive! We serve a risen Savior, alive and active in the world. The wonder of Easter lies in the fact that Jesus was revealed to be **exactly** who He said He was. The truth of Easter, Jesus' resurrection, is central to the good news of the gospel.

Now, the reality is that there are lots of Grinch's who try their best to steal Easter, but they seem to forget that we know how the story ends. On that first Easter morning, as the first light of dawn began to break over a borrowed tomb, God brought His Son back to life. It **really** happened. And **because** it really did, we can have **true** faith, **true** forgiveness, and a true hope for the future. Our faith is vindicated. As Jesus said to his disciples, “because I live, you will live also.” This is indeed good news. This is the best possible news! It's the conquest of death that's precisely what all of us **long** for, **hope** for, and desperately **need**. The resurrection isn't simply the **way** of salvation. it **is** the salvation! And so, sin does not have the last word, death isn't the end. Because Christ is alive, our **future** is changed. And, maybe more importantly, our **present** can be different. Abundant life – right here, right now – the kind of life that God intends for us isn't only **possible** but within our grasp. So, once again, the Grinch has been thwarted. He wasn't able, nor will he ever **be** able, to steal Easter. This doesn't mean he won't continue to try, it just means that we know how the story will end.

Thanks and praise be to God...Christ is risen indeed!

Amen and amen.