

Stuck Lid, Open Tomb
Easter Sunday - April 1, 2018
The Rev. Dr. Ted Cole, Jr.

What is your theory of how change happens? Do you think change happens slowly, over time, like the way the shoreline shifts after years of tides ebbing and flowing over it? Does change happen in leaps and jumps, like the growth spurts of living things that move from one stage of life to the next, a tadpole to a frog, a baby to a toddler? I heard a theory of change the other day that had never occurred to me before - the stuck lid theory of change. Have you heard of this?

If you haven't, I am certain you know the experience. You have a jar of something you want to open, and no matter how hard you try, ~~THE-LID-WILL-NOT-COME-OFF!~~ What are the things we do when we cannot get a lid off a jar? We take a towel and wrap it around the lid to get a better grip. We hand it off to another person so they can try. We run the lid under hot water if it is metal to get the metal to expand and relieve the tightness around the lip of the jar. We bang the lid against a hard surface to loosen it in places (but be careful! You don't want to break the jar!). Whatever we do, we come back to grabbing the jar and the lid, and ~~TWISTING-TWISTING-TWISTING-IT'S-NEVER-GOING-TO-OPEN-WHY-DOES-GOD-HATE-ME-I-AM-GOING-STARVE-~~ and then suddenly -POP!- off it comes! The stuck lid theory of change says that it seems like nothing is ever going to be different until suddenly, it is. This is a wonderfully evocative way to describe the change of Easter Sunday - it seems like nothing is ever going to change, and then suddenly, everything is different!

If we want to appreciate fully and deeply the power of this morning we need help, we need to connect with the experience our ancestors in the faith first hearing about Easter morning. Our gospel writer, Mark, gives us a very dramatic way to do that. We do not know for a fact, but scholars speculate that Mark's Gospel, Mark's telling of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, began as an oral telling. That is, it was a story that was shared with others from memory mouth to ear, not written down to be read from hand to eye. So imagine with me we are turning our ears to the sacred storyteller mouth as they share with us of the story of Jesus. We are hearing for the first time of Jesus humbly being baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist and receiving the anointing of the Holy Spirit. We hear how Jesus goes into the wilderness to pray and fast and discern what his ministry is as the Anointed One, as the Christ, the Messiah. He comes back from the wilderness and he teaches and heals and liberates. He calls followers to him and empowers them to carry on his ministry. We feeds the hungry and brings those outcast and ashamed from sin into his movement of God's realm, God's ways (in traditional language, God's Kingdom).

We hear the story told and we are moved by how this young prophet is making manifest the hope and longing of God's people for justice and love and reconciliation. We hear with confusion as Jesus tells his closest followers that he is going to die in Jerusalem and rise to new life. We share with Peter his indignation at the very idea and we feel the sting as Jesus rebukes Peter and calls on all of us to take up our cross if we would follow him. We hear the story and journey with Jesus to Jerusalem. We too receive him with joy and shouts of Hosanna, like those waving palms on that day. We feel the excitement of the city and wonder what will happen. We cheer as Jesus confronts and silences the religious leaders who

fear him and his movement. We wonder if this Jesus is the one to bring the change that God's people have longed for since the days of Isaiah, the one through whom "...God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of the people God will take away from all the earth..."

We hear the story, and it suddenly, tragically becomes like so many of the painful real world stories we know all too well. Betrayal, arrest, cowardice, violence, the powerful assaulting the powerless, oppression stamping down freedom and liberation. Jesus is tried, handed over to the Romans and crucified. He cries out in agony on the cross and dies. The excitement and hope we felt hearing of his ministry is now dashed. Maybe we feel sadness and loss. Maybe we are simply stunned, in shock as it were. Maybe we feel shame that we dared to hope in the first place when we should know better.

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint Jesus. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. The storyteller stops and stands there silently, looking at us one by one. A few voices halting break the silence, "Wait, what?" "They told no one?" "I don't understand." The storyteller looks at us, one by one. And then says, "The story was mine. Now it is yours. What are you going to do with it?"

Mark presents the Gospel to us as a drama, a drama in which we all have a part, in which you have a part. All the hope and excitement we feel at Easter morning is not meant to be a pleasant comforting fantasy, a rewriting of the tragedy of our lives as if they never happened. The power and hope of Easter morning, the power and hope of the Resurrection is to face tragedy, oppression, violence and evil with love and reconciliation and goodness, and to manifest the truth - that God's ways give more life than the ways of the world, that love is greater than death, that violence is not the final word, that hope is eternal.

In our world today, we hear a steady stream of news that is of violence and oppression, of corruption and exploitation. Generations before us have been struggling to change things for the better, often times fruitlessly and with no visible sign of change. And then it happens. Change comes, the stuck jar lid opens, and the world is a more just and compassionate place. From Seneca Falls to Selma to Stonewall, we know places and stories and people in our world where it seemed like injustice would never end, when it seemed like the jar would never open, and then it did. We are in the midst of such a "stuck-jar-lid" transformation right now, led by the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. These young people are manifesting a powerful kind of Resurrection in response to the Crucifixion they collectively experienced on February 14, 2018. For many of us, seeing these young people take

action is a sign of hope, an affirmation that change is still possible, that justice and peace and love are still coming.

But here's the thing, my friends - hearing and seeing the story unfold is not enough; we need to become part of the story.

If we would truly see justice, peace and love flourish in our world, if we would truly be people of the Resurrection, if we would truly be followers of Jesus the Christ, then it is not enough to hear the story told to us. We need to enter into the story, to become a living part of it and to share it with others. We need to accept the blessing of hearing and the burden of enacting and retelling the story of the Cross and the Empty Tomb. We retell and re-enact this story of Good Friday Crucifixion and Easter Sunday Resurrection because the work of striving for justice, peace, love and reconciliation is never ending. Progress is generational, conditional, always in need of renewal. You are here this morning not simply to be cheered by the good news of Resurrection, but to become a part of it. Will you play your part in this never-ending, unfolding drama of God's salvation manifesting the power to bring new life from death and to make all things new?

The storyteller stands there, silently, looking at each of us one by one and says "The story was mine. Now it is yours. What will you do with it?"