

Text: John 20:24-30

Good morning people of St. James! I am very much missing all of you and I hope you know that even though the building is closed, we, the people of the church are still open and here to serve you. It has been wonderful hearing from so many of you these past weeks so please don't hesitate to reach out – we are here for you.

Now today, in place of a sermon, I thought we could have a little bit of fun...I hear that right now people need levity more than ever and that laughter is essential medicine for the heart and soul, and so I am going to be offering you a special investigative report on a story we've been following with great interest here at St. James on the events surrounding the life of Jesus of Nazareth and his death and resurrection.

Now during this time of isolation and sheltering in place I have been kind of branching out into some new fields of study, because, as many of you parents know -we have been promoted to teach children of all grade levels – and I'm becoming an expert, not only in the ABC's but also first grade common core math as well as high school level political science. But why stop there? Because, as many of us know, clergy also make really good detectives. Yes –it's what they call "clerical sleuths" – and many books and TV shows have been based on this well-known fact. There's the mystery series on the BBC about Fr. Brown the detective and the PBS series about Fr. Sidney Chambers called Grantchester- about a very good looking priest who also makes an excellent detective- and the more modern mystery series about the Episcopal priest detective, the Rev. Clare Fergusson, among others.

So apparently, clergy have a lot in common with all the great detectives, for reasons that are still unclear. So, I thought I would try my hand at some detective work myself– despite, surprisingly, having no classes in seminary on criminology or forensic science. I'm feeling verrrry Nancy Drew right now and I have watched every episode of Benedict Cumberbatch as Sherlock Holmes as well as, of

course, all those Robert Downey Jr. movies about him.

So, this week I bring my detective skills to the case of the empty tomb. I was actually inspired to investigate this case after I tuned in to see the latest news being given by the Rev. Canon Allisyn Thomas at St. Bartholomew's, Poway, who has done some wonderful investigative reporting on this story- so thank you Allisyn. And my children have also been assisting me on this case. My six year old actually discovered a photograph, something he claimed to be photographic evidence of a photo taken recently in an undisclosed location of Jesus – let me show you the photo he submitted (show photo). After careful scrutiny, I had to tell him that we could not confirm its authenticity. But, I have not been dissuaded and I have gone on to collect actual, credible evidence on this case. And so, for those who are skeptical and still wondering about the resurrection-whether it could have really happened, I'd like to share my clues and detective work with you.

The first clue involves the actual witness accounts we have of the resurrection. Over the past several Sundays we have been hearing about these accounts – the sightings of Jesus by his followers, like Mary Magdalene, and last Sunday Fr. Mark described the sightings by Jesus' disciples as they were sheltering in place in a locked room and now this week – is the most incredible account yet – we are hearing about the apostle Thomas, who some have taken to calling "Doubting Thomas" – because he was once a skeptic, but he is now also a believer in the resurrection –and reports that he has not only seen Jesus – but actually encountered him in the flesh – having touched the wounds in Jesus' hands and side. And there are many other witnesses too: Paul of Tarsus actually put together a whole list of witnesses who have seen the resurrected Jesus-and you can see that for yourself - there is a list in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8...very interesting.

I will report that there have been some slightly divergent accounts of the resurrection events

coming from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – with a few discrepancies in their stories, including exactly who got to the empty tomb first – how many angels there were, and did Jesus actually look like the gardener, or not? So they don't agree completely on every detail, which some people claim is a problem to verifying these accounts, but detectives, like me, know that authentic eyewitness accounts tend to have slightly different details. For example, when investigating a crime, when detectives interview witnesses, they will find that witnesses often and usually recall details differently – often saying that events happened in a different sequence than others, or with other small discrepancies in the who, what, when and where... and in fact, if witness accounts all were identical—that would actually be suspicious because that could indicate that witnesses were coached to give identical stories – thus making the accounts unreliable. So, not so in this case -those discrepancies in the story actually serve to make it more authentic.

Another clue is the fact that the tomb is simply empty: Jesus is no longer there-and they have checked repeatedly –and while there is no body - there have been appearances of angels at the site (the angels just, apparently, completely ignored any police tape and that large stone the authorities placed there to keep people out), but the empty tomb is a very important clue.

Another clue is the fact that all the first witnesses to the resurrection were women – and in the first century, of course, women's testimonies did not hold the weight of men's – and so- we would expect that if the accounts were simply made up – they would have wanted to lean on more "reliable" first witnesses. So these accounts are quite compelling since they seem to point to a more honest and authentic description of what occurred...thank you to the women.

Also, clever investigators will use something called "inference to the best explanation" – which means that we start with all available evidence and then infer, if a theory were to be true, what the best

explanation would be. When we employ this technique to the resurrection, I believe we find the best explanation to be that the resurrection of Jesus really did occur, because any other explanation leaves us with more questions and a greater mystery to solve...like why would someone die for a lie? Every single apostle was eventually killed for their commitment to Jesus and the truth of the resurrection. And that is incredibly compelling evidence.

So, my sleuthing on this case leads me to believe that Jesus really did rise from the dead - many people have seen him and we have we have compelling historical evidence. In addition, many people continue to experience Jesus in their lives today, and this incredible testimony of resurrection has been changing lives ever since the first century. In fact, the resurrection account of Jesus has changed the course of human history.

Now, taking off my "detective hat" for a moment, let me say that the reason the resurrection changes lives in such deep and important ways, is that it assures us of God's power and that God in Christ is with us, no matter what we may experience, no matter what trials we may have, including this pandemic: we can be assured that we are not alone – God is with us and continues to speak to us and walk with us through Jesus.

Second, the resurrection brings us incredible hope – hope that death is not the final word and that death itself has been defeated. We can be assured that our lives have meaning -and we will be with God and one another again one day beyond the grave. Jesus was the first to rise, but we too will rise with him through the power of God's love in this Easter victory. Death is not the end of the story – it is the beginning of a new one. We have inherited new life in Christ and his death and resurrection have changed everything.

So I will close my report with deep hope and joy in the truth and glory of the resurrection...and by saying, "Alleluia Christ is Risen!" The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!