

The Reverend Beth Lind Foote
Easter Vigil, April 7, 2012
Genesis 1:1 – 2:2
Exodus 14:10-15:1
Ezekiel 36: 24-28
Romans 6: 3-11
Mark 16: 1-8

I drive a lot because of my commute from the East Bay, but I feel like taking a real road trip: I'd love to leave 880 behind and hit 80 going East, past Tahoe, way out into Nevada, and beyond. Road trips are fun because you get into the rhythm of the road, and you can tell stories for hours.

Out in the Mountain time-zone there are those long, wide vistas. The last time my family drove through Utah, there was so much open space that we saw an entire freight train at once---engine, freight cars and caboose---out in the distance. What a metaphor for seeing the Big Picture, that AHA moment when you are able to have a wide angle lens vision of everything at once.

Tonight, at the Easter Vigil, we are on a Road Trip together, and we're telling stories of our faith. Tonight we are privileged to see a glimpse of the big picture of Salvation History in the rituals and texts of this ancient service.

Following the kindling of the fire symbolizing the Light of Christ, we settled into the rhythm of the I-80 of Salvation History, with the Creation Story in Genesis. I do not believe the world was made in seven days, but I love the creation story. We hear about the void, the primal elements, and the breath of the divine moving over the waters. This movement of the Holy Spirit propels the rest of our journey tonight.

Then there's our story from Exodus, one of the great stories of deliverance from oppression. There is some historical doubt whether the Hebrews were ever actually enslaved by the Egyptians. But one of the things we learn along our roadtrip of faith is that things do not have to have literally happened to be true.

God opens a way through the Red Sea for the Israelites to walk to freedom, and this opening of a new way is constant theme in the stories we share along the road trip of faith.

But living a life of faith has never been easy, as we see in much of the Hebrew Scriptures. Over and over again, the prophets reached out to the Hebrew people, to bring them back into right relationship with God. Tonight we heard the beautiful passage from Ezekiel about being sprinkled with clean water, and God replacing a stony heart with a tender heart of flesh.

Receiving a “heart of flesh” that is full of love. Isn’t that what happens when we have children? Babies have a way of opening our hearts to a deep and sweet love we didn’t know existed, and the life stage of raising children is a powerful experience for many of us on our road trip of faith.

Gillian and John, Donna and George, we are privileged tonight to share this baptismal experience with you, and your families. Lewis, Reese, Stewart and Amelia will bring you many joys, and there will also be many unpredictable twists and turns along the way. And sometimes, as a parent, the road of faith seems to shrink down to a rocky, uncertain footpath.

When you have those moments of uncertainty of faith as a parent, I invite you to remember this service, when we get a glimpse of the Big Picture. Remember the power of your children being sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever. In my experience, when I keep that baptismal perspective as a parent, the path of parenting with faith reappears before me. I hope that is true for you, too, as your children grow and mature with you.

In our reading from The Gospel of Mark, the road trip of Salvation History and faith seems to come to a screeching halt at the Tomb of Jesus.

As the two Marys and Salome walked to the Tomb, they were wondered, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" In other words, "the world has come to an end and we have no idea how we're going to go on."

But then they see that the stone has been rolled back for them. Something incredible has happened.

Mark says they walked into the Tomb, where they saw the young man robed in white sitting there on the right. He says, "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."

Mark says, "they fled the tomb for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

I think the women reacted totally appropriately. They have encountered something beyond their human understanding. They get more than a glimpse of the Big Picture, and it's on the same awesome plane as the Creation Story and the Exodus Story, and their hearts of flesh are shaking with an overflowing of love. God has acted in a mysterious and shocking way.

This seems to be the “end” of the Gospel of Mark, and the “end” of the Easter story. But of course it is not the “end” of the roadtrip of Salvation History. The dead-end of death turns out to be only a roadblock.

Creation, Deliverance from Bondage, receiving a new, tender heart of love. These are more than historical stories, these are real events in our own lives. We each have our own stories of Creation, of Exodus and stories of Love...and Resurrection.

This is what I like about Mark’s Easter account. It feels very modern; it’s open-ended and assumes we will fill in the blank spaces with our own experience. There are no Alleluias and no Angels. We don’t see the figure of Jesus himself. We only hear that he is ahead of us, further down the road in Galilee, waiting for us.

Through the doorway of the Tomb we can see the Big Picture of God's love for us. New life, new hope for the future beyond our imagining.

Mark's Resurrection story invites us to meet the Risen Jesus in our own daily lives, our own Galilees, in Menlo Park, where the Risen Christ will meet us, and walk with us.

Because, like Lewis and Amelia, and the whole communion of saints, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever. The road trip of faith continues with us and will go on from generation to generation. As we've promised in our Baptismal Covenant, let's keep telling the stories! The Risen Christ lives in the telling and the living out of our stories of love. Christ is Risen! Happy Easter! Amen.

Mark 16:1-8

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, 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.

