

Easter

A sermon by the Rev. Dr. Robert D. Flanagan for
Palm Sunday, Year C, Luke 24:1-12

“He is not here but has risen.”

Those words spoken by the angels at the empty tomb are a treasure for each of us. A gift box from God. To be a Christian is to hold in our souls the angelic announcement made on Easter morning so long ago.

When I was a child, my mother, or perhaps one of my grandmothers—I can’t exactly remember—had a little box that held some of her jewelry. It was covered in fancy gold applique with small ornate feet. When she opened the box, a tiny ballerina popped up, and music began to play as the figurine spun. The box also had a little mirror on the back of the lid. It was as if I was peering into the ballerina’s private dance studio while she was practicing by herself. It felt special.

I didn’t care about the jewelry, but rather was delighted by the spinning ballerina and the music coming from the box. I then found the small winding key on the bottom. When the music finished and the figurine stopped spinning, I wanted to wind it up for myself. I was, of course, not allowed to touch it. Lest I wound it too tightly and broke it. I was about five-years-old after all. When I discovered the musical mechanism, I was fascinated by it. I watched the cylinder covered in bumps turn and then saw the bumps strike the small metal tines. The music coming from the small metal mechanism seemed magical at that age. The box was like a treasure chest in so many ways.

Last Monday, I was horrified to watch the burning of the treasure box located in central Paris. The bright flames leapt high in the sky, and billows of smoke rose from the Cathedral of Notre Dame. It looked like a furnace—one so hot that not even an angel could have saved Meshack, Shadrack, and Abednego from its flames. When the tower fell, I breathlessly waited for the cathedral’s stonewalls to collapse. A lone firefighter, standing atop of a ladder, sprayed water at the fire pointlessly. How could so little water make a difference?

The fire at Notre Dame was not the only one last week. On Tuesday, Bishop Dietsche described to the priests of the Diocese the fire that had occurred last Sunday, in between the Palm Sunday services, at our cathedral, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in upper Manhattan. Fortunately, the fire was discovered soon after it started. The FDNY quickly extinguished it, and the remaining Palm Sunday service was held outdoors. Another cathedral was put at risk of fire this past week too. The police arrested a man walking into St. Patrick’s Cathedral in midtown on Wednesday evening. He was carrying two large containers of gasoline and fire starters. These fires remind us of the risks our buildings, both big and small, face. While they are treasure boxes of our religion. It’s good to remember that they are not containers of our faith.

On the first Easter morning, God demonstrated that our Christian faith cannot and is not to be contained. The tomb could not hold Jesus. The large stone rolled in front of its entrance could not keep out God’s power. On Easter, we remember and acknowledge that our faith is not

small but great. Our faith is not held in a small box or even in a large church, but it bursts from our hearts into the world. Our God is big and bold. Our faith is, too.

The world today is so troubling for many people. When did things get so bad and out of control? Many people are so angry today; so many are fearful. The world seems to be teetering on an edge that feels more dangerous than ever before. What are we to do?

Our answer comes to us in our treasure boxes. "He is not here but has risen." Our answer comes from the remains of Notre Dame Cathedral. "He is not here but has risen." Our answer is found on Easter morning. "He is not here but has risen." Our answer is here.

Our faith holds the key to the world's ails. Easter morning and our celebration of it today states loudly and clearly that we are not to be afraid. We can let go of anger. We can be the soothing, gentle sound of the music box that calms our neighbors, friends, and family. The world may seem out of control and teetering at the edge of a dark abyss, but God is there keeping it and us from falling into oblivion.

The goodness of God that we hold in our treasure boxes is meant to be shared. It is meant for the world. We are to carry it into the world. More and more it is clear that what separates Christians and other religious people from non-practicing and non-religious people is the message of God. Our Easter message is true. "He is not here but has risen."

Our message lets us have joy and happiness in the face of anger and fear. All is not lost. No. We celebrate instead. Darkness and despair, sin and death, evil and Satan do not have the final word. God does. So, let the bold message of Easter fill your hearts today and sing loudly, for Jesus has risen! Alleluia, Alleluia!