

Easter Vigil 2003
"Telling the Story"
Br. John Ogle, FBC

Let me tell you a story.

A sobbing little girl stood near a small church ..she had been turned away from the Sunday School because she was told it was "too crowded." The Pastor of the Church saw her ..she told him what happened. When he saw her shabby clothes and scuffed shoes ..he sensed what had *really* happened so he took her by the hand and brought her in to the Sunday School. She was so happy that he had found room for her. That night, as she lay in her bed all she could think about was the other children who were turned away ..who couldn't go to Sunday School.

Two years later the little girl died in one of the poor rundown buildings that are common in big cities. The Pastor was asked by her desperately poor mother to handle the final arrangements. As her body was being moved a small purse fell from her pocket. Inside the purse was 57 cents and a note. The note said "this is to help build the little church bigger so more children can go to Sunday School." The child had been collecting for two years.

A newspaper wrote the story ..it was picked up nationwide. The story of her unselfish love and devotion touched hearts all over the country.

But that's not the end of the story.

Money started to pour in to the church ..within five years \$250 thousand dollars had been collected ..and that was a lot of money at the turn of the 19th century. The next time you're in Philadelphia look up Temple Baptist Church ..seating capacity 33 hundred ..and Temple University ..Good Samaritan Hospital ..and at the church ..check out the Sunday School ..with room for hundreds of children ..no one will ever be left outside again.

In one of the rooms is a picture of the little girl whose 57 cents ..so sacrificially saved ..made such remarkable history. Next to it .. A picture of Dr. Russell Conwell ..author of the book ACRES OF DIAMONDS ...and the Pastor who knew her.

What God can do ..with 57 cents.

The story touches you as you hear it. Retelling it touches me. A range of emotions and feelings come to mind ..each of us responds differently to the details ..depending on our life experiences ..but the message is loud and clear.

Tonight, we've heard other stories. We've heard the greatest story ever told. We've heard it before ..but we still love it. We still need to hear it. It is the story of an event that has NEVER been repeated. Only one man has ever risen from the dead. The Savior of the World. Jesus, Christ.

The readings ..taken from the significant moments in the history of salvation, along with the strong symbols of this celebration ..darkness ..fire ..water ..call us to make our own pilgrimage, our own passage from death to life along with Jesus. The renewal of our baptismal vows is a reminder of our commitment to Christ.

What he suffered ..sacrificing His life ..for us and his defeat of death itself ..should be repeated ..should be remembered each time we see the image of the cross ..each time we take a breath.

The story we tell tonight is at the core of what we believe. Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. The third day he rose again from the dead. Each time we celebrate the Eucharist we are doing it "in remembrance" of this story ..of the night he was "handed over to suffering and death." Our liturgy reenacts this story. This isn't history of a long ago time and a people we can't relate to. This story shaped our faith and continues to do that today ..to inspire our imagination ..to instruct our view of the world.

We are able to touch the risen Christ in faith.

We are reminded of how Christ defeated sin and death rising in victory from the grave. Sin and evil continue to exist in the world but through Christ we are able to survive them to reduce them. We hear the story ..we believe ..we are able to connect it to our own lives in our own time.

Tonight we are able to imagine ourselves with Mary and Mary ..discovering the tomb is empty ..the Christ has risen ..salvation is ours.

We need to tell the story to each other ..to our children ..to our friends ..even to our enemies. The answers to our questions and theirs ..are in it. By Faith ..through His sacrifice ..we are saved ..freed ..made whole.

Tonight we began in darkness ..moved into the light. Open the dark places in your life to the story ..let the light of Christ shine IN you and FROM you. AMEN