

**Homily, St. Andrew's  
Easter Sunday, March 27, 2016  
Luke 24:1-12**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever more acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

How quickly things change... Through a leadership training program several years ago, I learned the phrase: "Gradually, then suddenly." It comes from Ernest Hemingway's novel *The Sun Also Rises* as the answer to a question: "How did you go bankrupt?" The answer: "Gradually, then suddenly." I know the quote from *Fierce Conversations*, a book by Susan Scott based on the conviction that [quote] "our work, our relationships, and, in fact, our very lives succeed or fail gradually, then suddenly, one conversation at a time." (1) It is a compelling idea that we are continually engaged in a process of succeeding or failing... or theologically we might say it's a process of "living or dying"... gradually, then suddenly.

As Scott introduces her ideas, she writes of incremental degradation... the slow and deadly slide that occurs before a company or a life goes, suddenly and horribly, off the rails. Alternatively, our organizations and our lives can become "suddenly" successful - alive! - through authentic and robust conversations... conversations that might take 5 minutes or continue over the course of years. Scott writes: "while no single conversation is guaranteed to change the trajectory of a business, a career, a marriage or a life, any single conversation *can*." (1) The same could be said of the choices we make each moment. The vast majority of the time, we live in the "gradually"... but every so often... sometimes we see it coming, sometimes we don't... but every so often, "suddenly" arrives and changes everything.

Today is a day when we celebrate "suddenly." It follows on from sudden changes that have been occurring throughout the week. After 3 years of travelling around as a itinerant preacher, teacher and healer, Jesus gradually worked his way towards Jerusalem, gathering a community of friends and a reputation along the way. He finally entered Jerusalem last Sunday to great fanfare and even greater expectation. But then suddenly the mood shifted and the crowd turned... how quickly things change. We found ourselves among the many who deserted Jesus and called for his crucifixion. Though Jesus declared his love for us, in word and in deed, during a Last Supper in the upper room, we suddenly abandoned our friend, as he was unfairly tried and led off to die. We wept, from a distance, at the morbid scene of crosses littering the landscape... innocent and criminal alike condemned to death. We should have seen it coming... maybe we did see it coming, but still... change is always a shock. Suddenly, Jesus is dead.

A faithful man, Joseph of Arimathea asks Pilate if he can take Jesus' body for a proper burial. Jesus is taken down from the cross, his body "wrapped in a linen cloth, and laid... in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid." (23:53) Women followed, to see where Jesus' body was laid and then returned to their homes to prepare spices and ointments, so that Jesus would be properly anointed in burial. But it was the Day of Preparation and the Sabbath was about to begin and so their task remained unfinished. "On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment." (23:56)

It wasn't until today... this very morning... the first day of the week, when we come to the tomb. The stone is rolled away and the body is not inside. Along with the women who first discovered it, we stand perplexed. What could have happened? We have barely had time to even begin processing our grief... Jesus' body has yet even to be anointed with the spices and ointments we brought. The gradual process of re-building our lives following the tragedy of death has hardly even begun and now, suddenly, two men in dazzling clothes stand beside us and through our terror at their appearance they say: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? Jesus is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified and on the third day rise again." How quickly things change.

Suddenly, the veil between heaven and earth drops. Suddenly, Jesus' work over the past few years of teaching and healing clicks into place. Suddenly, our grief is broken and we remember Jesus' words. Maybe we should have seen it coming, but really... how could we have known what was coming? Suddenly, Jesus is alive. And we return from the empty tomb to tell the 11 disciples and all the rest, that a miracle of life, new and resurrected life, has suddenly occurred.

"Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them." Suddenly, a miracle butts up against reality and we discover that only gradually will change come.

These women we hear from today aren't the only women who were not believed this week. The judge who acquitted Jian Ghomeshi of sexual assault and other charges said that he just couldn't rely on the testimony of the 3 women complainants. I know there is much that has and can be said about the whole situation but it comes down to what - and perhaps more importantly, who - we choose to believe. Who can we trust? Whose stories are real and whose are frivolous, trivial, idle?

Idle tales are simply not worth listening to. Idle tales are a waste of breath... mindless chit chat. But what if a better translation, a better description, of the women's story was that it was "nonsense"? Words that have no meaning or make no sense are nonsense. Nonsense may not be good, but at least it has more dignity... it is a story that must be considered before it can be refuted as making no sense. Idle tales, on the other hand, are frivolous... something to be dismissed outright. Whatever the women said, the apostles "did not believe them." Another translation might say they "did not trust them." It begs the question: Did the apostles dismiss the women's testimony because it was nonsense and then realize they couldn't be trusted? Or were the women not trusted from the outset, and so their tale must be idle? Who do we trust to tell the truth?

More than a simple story of belief and doubt, this story should have us stop and wonder... When we are judging whether or not truth is being spoken, do we consider what we think of who is doing the telling? Are the ones most likely to be believed those who have social or economic power... those who look like us, or act like us... those who we consider respectable... those who are in positions of privilege in our society? It is easier and safer for us to dismiss the testimony of those on the margins, those who are not like us, those who are victimized or oppressed, because then we don't have any responsibility. If they aren't credible

witnesses, we don't have to change a thing. If the women's tale today is idle, then our lives can simply go on as though nothing miraculous has happened.

It certainly can be hard to believe in life or light or love these days. With such serious economic difficulties; with violence against women, LGBTQ people, or religious minorities seeming to escalate; with refugees and terrorist attacks... it can sure look like human depravity and spiritual darkness is taking over. It is no wonder that it is a struggle to believe and to trust. But then what if the story of the women is true? What might that mean - for our lives and for our world? What if God really can work a miracle, bringing life out of death? What if a better life, a more fulfilling life, a life with greater peace and joy is possible? What if...?

The change has happened so quickly... suddenly... this morning. And so it might take time to gradually come to believe, and to gradually work out what this new belief means. But as we gradually live as though it were true... as we gradually choose to believe that love, reconciliation, peace, justice, forgiveness is possible... as we gradually change our behaviour so that this new and transformed world - the kingdom of God - begins here, with us, with each new day... that is when we gradually, then suddenly, discover the new life of Christ in our midst.