

I welcome especially the family and friends of Shey-anne, who will be Baptized – and Cindy, who will be making a profession of faith tonight. You, their family and friends – as well as all of us gather here – have chosen to invest a lot of time in them this evening --- just as they have invested a lot of time over the last several months --- in order to get themselves to this night.

So, Shey-anne and Cindy --- Sam, and Josh and Jill /// and Mary and Jim ---- have helped God to probe and prod your minds and hearts which has resulted in this community of faith gathering with you tonight. Congratulations on your journey!

On the first Sunday of Lent – I introduced the word that has guided our Lenten journey. It was the word that one Scripture scholar says is the answer to the question: what is the Bible all about? -- and explains why God does and says the things God says and does in Scripture.

That word, used 303 times in Scripture – is the word: COVENANT – which is simply how the Bible explains God’s relationship to us –and our relationship with God.

Tonight – we gather in joy--- to seal your covenant with God – through the sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

On this most holy night – we read more Scripture than we normal read in almost a month on Sundays – and there were many more readings that we could have used – but in order to get us home at a decent hour --- we exercised our option to limit them.

When we read from the Scriptures – we are always reading of God’s love for us. Such was the case this evening. And if we did read all of the suggested readings for tonight ---- those readings would have covered a span of approximately 2,000 years of time – from the time Genesis, our oldest reading was written – to the Gospel of Mark – the most recently written of our readings.

The point I wish to make is not the exact span of time – which leads some, then , to estimate the age of the world ---- but the point of consistency in the story line of this broad range of readings. The story that has repeated itself well over 2,000 years --- and will continue to repeat itself within OUR brief life span --- and repeats itself in the very fabric of our individual faith lives – is ---

In love, God reaches out to people.

People respond to God’s love.

People get distracted by other things and stray from God.

God doesn’t give up and reaches out, again // and again /// and again --- in love.

The question that comes to my mind is: I wonder if God ever gets tired? Tired of you, tired of me, tired of all his created beings – who just can’t seem to stay focused or committed for very long. . .

And that is an easy question to answer based on this 2,000 years of writing found in the Bible---- NO!

God NEVER tires of extending both his love and his mercy – because God desires nothing else than to spend all eternity with each of God’s beloved creations – including you and me.

*I have loved you with an everlasting love. . .*

EVEN IF –a mother could forget her child --- God will NEVER forget us!

And that’s the Good News we celebrate tonight and every time we gather for the Eucharist. We follow a very strange God --- one who lavishes, LAVISHES, such extravagant love on each of us. A God who gets down on your knees God who does anything he needs to – so as to gain our attention. And to capture our hearts. A God who does not even withhold his own Son from us --- allowing him to be crucified for our sake – setting us free from sin and death!

And the best news of all --- is that not even a tomb could hold Jesus --- not even a tomb can contain God’s love. Not even a tomb – can stop God from loving us.

No, as the women who go to the tomb when the Sabbath was over find out --- the stone is rolled away from the tomb so that we could get in and see that death has been robbed of its power.

The stone is rolled away --- so that we could get in and see that a new world order has begun – and we can see the truth of Jesus words: “destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.”

The stone is rolled away – so that we can see, and hear, and experience that by his cross and resurrection, Jesus has set us free. Free from sin. Free from death. Free from our ways of doing things and seeing things.

Free from all those things that keep us from fulfilling our end of the covenant: loving God with all our minds and all our hearts, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. Free – from all those things that distract us and keep us from being focused on – and committed to – the covenant relationship.

THE TOMB IS EMPTY!

And there is only one way of responding to such good news: *alleluia, alleluia – alleluia. . .*

HAPPY EASTER!