

St. Paul's – March 31, 2024
Easter Day – Year B
Isaiah 25:6-9; Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18

Do we have any HGTV fans? HGTV is the cable channel dedicated to reality programming around home improvement and real estate. The channel carries a variety of shows. One is *My Lottery Dream Home*, where recent lottery winners meet with a real estate agent to find their dream home, which they can now afford with their lottery winnings. Another show is *Love It or List It*, which always involves a couple who has issues with the design of their current home. One spouse loves the home and wants to stay, believing some remodeling will solve the issues. The other spouse is quite confident that remodeling will not be able to address the issues and wants to move. So, designer Hilary and realtor David step in. The couple gives Hilary a budget to remodel their home, and David starts showing the couple other houses in the area, which solve the problems in their current home. The show ends with the couple taking a tour of their remodeled home, and then they are asked, “Are you going to love it or list it?”

The show I want to focus in on this morning is called *Good Bones*. Mother and daughter, Karen and Mina, are based in Indianapolis. They look for rundown homes, homes that many-a-builder would tear down. They buy these homes for almost nothing, and then remodel them. Typically, they gut a portion of the house, repair the foundation, reframe, drywall, do plumbing and electrical, then move on to all the finishes: floors, cabinets, hardware, countertops, appliances, paint and wall coverings. Karen and Mina often talk about how houses have stories and the importance of preserving history, while making the house new for the next generation. On an episode I was watching recently, they were doing work on the exterior of a house and needed to remove some gingerbread latticework. Rather than throwing this woodwork away, they brought it inside and repurposed it for shelving. I love Karen and Mina's mission. They see

the “good bones” of these homes and so preserve and rehab, rather than tear down. And, guess what? Once they go into a neighborhood and successfully rehab an old home, others jump in to do the same and, together, they revitalize the community. Good Bones.

Jesus knows our Good Bones. Early in the morning, on the Sunday after Jesus was crucified, Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb. Last week, on Palm Sunday, the Gospel Passion ended on the day of Jesus’ crucifixion. Joseph of Arimathea wrapped Jesus’ body in a linen cloth and laid it in a tomb. Mary Magdalene was there – she saw Jesus’ body being laid in the tomb. Now, it’s Sunday morning after the burial, and she returns to the tomb. But, all she sees are the linen cloths. She begins to weep. Where is his body? Where have they taken him? Mary turns and sees someone she believes is the gardener. She asks him if he has moved the body. When he calls her by her name, when he says, “Mary!”, she realizes he is Jesus. The message is profound. Remember the words of the prophet Isaiah (49:1): “The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother’s womb he named me.” Jesus calls us by our name. Think about this. Jesus’ love is not simply random goodness, as wonderful as that goodness is all on its own. Jesus knows us by our name, knows us individually, knows our unique, intricate being. This is how he is able to reach us and nurture us and guide us. He knows our good bones and the possibility of new life.

I want to turn to a story that dates back a few years, to 2017, but it is still so relevant. A white nationalist was delivering a speech in Florida and a crowd gathered to protest. A white man named Randy was there in support of white supremacy and an African-American man named Aaron was there in protest. Aaron had been at the protest for almost four hours and was about to leave when he saw Randy. It occurred to him, he had an opportunity here, so he went up to Randy and asked him, “Why do you hate me?” Randy didn’t respond. Aaron asked for a

hug, but he didn't get much of a response from Randy. Aaron persisted and on the third try, Randy reciprocated, and wrapped his arms around Aaron. Aaron heard God whisper in his ear, "You changed his life." Aaron decided to try one more time and asked Randy, "Why do you hate me?" Randy finally responded, "I don't know." We are often unaware of how our lives are being shaped by our environment. Some of us are shaped by trauma and our different personalities respond to trauma, to neglect and abuse, in different ways. Evil is not random among us. Evil evolves through trauma. Randy responded, "I don't know." But, Christ knows. Christ knows us by name. Christ knows our good bones. Christ is always showing us a way forward and desiring us to see that way forward, to see new life in God's justice and righteousness.

Now, let's look at Christ's love close to home, at a personal level. What is your disappointment? What is your fear? What is your heartache? Listen to these saving words from Isaiah. "The Lord of hosts ... will swallow up death forever. The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces. ... This is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us." Christ saves us. How is he able to wipe away our tears? Because he knows us individually. He knows our unique, intricate being. He knows our good bones, how to comfort and fortify us in our uniqueness, how to heal, how to show us our path forward. In our disappointment or fear or heartache, we might strain to find some means of momentary comfort. But, today, we know this: the Love that overcame the cross, the love that was crucified and yet returned, this love is limitless. Nothing else in this world compares. Nothing else in this world offers the Peace of Christ's love. This peace is granted to us deep in our souls. It comforts us through all of life, invites our gratitude, heightens our joy, inspires us to care for each other, to live in community with one another, to seek justice and righteousness for all.

Let us immerse ourselves in this love. Jesus' resurrection, Jesus returning to us strikes an indelible mark: Jesus is our Savior. Christ's love endures all. Christ's love sees right through to those good bones and leads us to new life. This is why we sing: "He is risen! Tell it out with joyful voice!" Alleluia!