Christ is risen! Alleluia! The emptiness of Thursday’s betrayal, the terror of Friday’s bloody cross are now but memories deep in history’s vault as with Peter, the Beloved Disciple, and all the apostles and disciples then and through the ages celebrate our Lord’s risen life. What else could possibly be written, said, or imagined that has not danced through the minds of preachers and the faithful for two millennia? But text must give way to voice and voice to preachers and preachers’ words to listeners’ ears declaring this story that must be told today and for all time.

This call to be witnesses to the resurrection demands a hearing! John’s Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles tell us… On that first day of the first week, that first Easter, Mary Magdalene became the resurrection’s first witness. In near darkness, just as the sun was poking its finger of light over the eastern horizon, she made her way to our Lord’s tomb only to find the stone rolled away. Confused … no…
terrified, she ran away to find Peter and the one identified as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” to report that his body was gone.

A foot race began as Peter and this other disciple raced to check it all out for themselves. The beloved disciple, younger, more fleet of foot, arrived at the tomb early, bent down, and saw the linen burial wrappings lying there but did not go in. When the apostle Peter arrived, he went straight in seeing those same cloths as well as another cloth rolled up neatly “in a place by itself.” Finally, the other disciple came in to the tomb. John tells us “he believed but they did not understand that he must rise from the dead.”

As more of the story is told in sentences we did not hear today, our Lord appears to Mary Magdalene in the garden and then, later that day, to all the disciples. Easter’s witnesses – Peter, the Beloved Disciple, Mary Magdalene, and all the apostles – give a unified voice to the good news Christians celebrate in every land around the world. Christ is risen! And we – all of us – are witnesses.
Some years later, after the birth of the Church at Pentecost and the spreading of the Christian message beyond Jerusalem, Peter is summoned to Cornelius’ house in Caesarea, there to announce this same good news. Cornelius was what the Jews of that day called “a God fearer”. Though Roman, this high ranking soldier believed the God of Israel was the one God who made heaven and earth. As he was praying one day, an angel of God told Cornelius to bring Peter from the southern coastal village of Joppa, some 60 miles away, to Caesarea.

In time, Peter makes his way there, standing before Cornelius, telling the story of Jesus. “We are witnesses,” said Peter, “to all [Jesus] said and did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day.” Peter went on to describe God’s calling to those who followed Jesus to be his witnesses testifying “about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”
On this blessed Easter day we hear a clarion call to be witnesses to our Lord’s saving life, his sacrificial death, and his glorious resurrection. The temptation every Easter worshipper faces on this day of almost inexpressible joy is to focus on the event of Easter, the rolling away of the stone, the empty tomb, other gospels’ reports of angels, and the striking glory of seeing the risen Lord and leave it at that, receive Communion, get an Easter blessing, and go home to a delicious meal with family and friends.

But the Easter good news will not let us off the hook so easily. Our Christian faith rests on the resurrection of Jesus. Paul will later tell the Corinthians that if Christ is not raised, our “faith is vain.” No resurrection, no good news, no Christian faith, no hope in this life or the next. The events of Easter, however, as important and pivotal as they are to all we believe, stop at the empty tomb if with Peter, the Beloved Disciple, Mary Magdalene, and all the faithful through the ages we fail to tell the story. We have a story of life beyond death, hope beyond the grave that must be told.
Will you tell it today? Would you say, first to yourself, “I am a witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ” and then with every believer in this place say together, “We are witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ”? More than a few of you are now wondering if I have lost my mind. We are not witnesses to the resurrection any more than we are witnesses to George Washington’s crossing of the Delaware River during the Revolutionary War. Yes, in one way, you are absolutely correct. None of us are witnesses to the event of Easter. But what if all of us are witnesses to the reality of Easter? Now that’s another thing all together.

Those who have baptismal water dripping off our brows are witnesses to the reality of the resurrection. Those who just reaffirmed their baptismal promises and professed their faith do too. In baptism, we died with Christ and are raised with Christ. In confirmation, we affirm the faith that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and on the third day rose from the grave. When we come forward to receive the bread and
share the cup, we hear again our Lord say, “This is my body given for you. This is my blood shed for you”. **We are witnesses** to the resurrection because we are born again into God’s very life through baptism.

But there is more. Not only are we witnesses to the Easter faith by baptism and sacrament, but we are witnesses to Christ’s risen life in the offering of our lives to others in sacrificial love. When we share a smile that comes from deep within our redeemed lives, knowing that God smiles at us, we share a glimpse of Christ’s risen life with someone else. When a person intentionally or without thinking poisons our souls with some thoughtless, inconsiderate act and we refuse to define that person by what they have done, we become witnesses to Jesus Christ, who loves them and us with a love that knows no end.

Yes, dear ones, on this Easter 2016, we are witnesses to the reality of the resurrection, demonstrated through every act of kindness, every thoughtful expression of love, every prayer asking God to heal the sick
and give comfort to the grieving the risen life of Jesus Christ who loves us and will never let us go. We cannot help but imagine how the resurrection happened. It was a singular event in human history unlike any other. But go beyond speculation, wonder, even the mystery of it all. My brothers and sisters, go beyond the special effects of what we imagine Easter was and be witnesses to the risen Lord sharing what Easter is. Christ is risen! Alleluia! And we are all witnesses through our lives, our voices, every act of kindness and mercy to this One who died and rose again. Tell that story! By God’s grace and with great love, we – all of us – are witnesses!