

A Sermon Preached at Maple Street Congregational Church, UCC
Danvers, MA
April 1, 2018 Easter Sunday
Rev. Kevin M Smith
John 20:1-18

A Great Rising Up

Easter should be a great time of joy and celebration. Easter represents the great “rising up.” It also represents a great emancipation from all that seeks to hold us down.

The other night in the midst of another one of our weekly Nor’easters I was looking for something good to watch on Netflix, and I came across the movie *Lincoln* in my “to watch” list. I’d seen it when it came out in the theaters, of course, but it has so many powerful messages of “rising up” that I had put it in my watch list a long time ago. It’s a great story of President Lincoln and his family’s life in that great time of national turmoil and the grief, strife, and some anger that they had to rise up from in their personal lives together. It’s an excellent story about political deal making and using compromise and every trick in the book to achieve a greater good. The movie was produced by Steven Spielberg, who also produced another wonderful emancipation story, too, called *Schindler’s List* about the heroic German industrialist who saved many, many Jews from death.

At the time *Schindler’s List* came out in the theaters, I was working for Governor Roberts of Oregon, who herself was a great rising up story—a single mom with an autistic child who changed history by passing one of the first laws requiring the public schools to let her child get an education. After that she went on to serve on the school board, in the Oregon Legislature, she became Secretary of State and then Governor. One day when she and I were in her office she took a call from Steven Spielberg. The wonderful producer was asking Governors to lead an effort to get the movie into high schools so that students would hear the great story of a rising up and emancipation from the evil of the Nazi regime. We did that, of course.

My favorite scene in the movie, *Lincoln*, was when Rep. Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania, who helped shepherd the bill to outlaw slavery through to final passage, borrowed the original copy of the just-passed bill creating the 13th Amendment to the Constitution and took the bill home for the night to show his beloved who happened to be an African American woman. What a powerful statement of resurrection on so many levels. Stevens was raised in Vermont, suffered a permanent disability that caused him to limp, had a

father who was an alcoholic and who deserted the family, and his mother worked as a maid. Eventually, though, Stevens graduated from Dartmouth and went on to become a lawyer in Gettysburg; and, after making a big mistake defending a slave owner to recover a runaway slave, he forever regretted his actions and became a fierce abolitionist and his time in Congress was spent working to end slavery. Talk about a great rising up. (<http://www.historynet.com/thaddeus-stevens.htm>)

My friends, if you just look close enough you can find resurrections, great rising up stories, all around you. Perhaps, you or a member of your family has recovered from some great stress, loss, tragedy, or a culture that just wanted to keep you in your place or keep you down. Perhaps you, or your family, or a friend have experienced a great rising up, a resurrection. Most of us have known someone, probably several someone's, who have overcome addictions, or great health or financial obstacles, or some form of crucifixion by those who discriminated against them or treated them unfairly.

These Bible stories that we read that inform our faith and lives, are really stories about us. For all of you who haven't cracked open the pages of a Bible since your Sunday School days, I urge you to open up your life and reading to one of the greatest literary works ever written in the history of the world. The Bible is a story book. It's a story book about great rising ups and resurrections. There are stories about you and me and the hard stuff of life. The stories in the Bible may not always be historical, or factual, but they hold the truth of the human condition more than any other book I've ever known.

This is what we do here at Maple Street Church—we live and tell our stories of great rising ups and resurrections that make us want to share the Good News of God's love for everyone to everyone—no matter who you are or where you are on your faith journey. And just like Mary Magdalene proclaimed to the disciples we have seen the Lord at work here at Maple Street Church. We have seen God inspire great rising ups and resurrections. On this first day of April when there can be so much silliness in the world let us think about the great rising up stories we know and share the hope of God's powerful love with our neighbors. And, that, my friends, is no April fool's joke. Amen.

