

Sermon on Easter 040421

My guess is that this morning, we don't get gussied up in our Sunday best with our Easter bonnets....nor do we gather together to debate the Doctrine of the Resurrection or even to try and put together... intellectually how resurrection could possibly occur. We don't even come to discuss what a wonderful and inspiring teacher Jesus...though... of course that is true... But on Easter, we don't come for any of that... Today... you and I come together to hear the good news and to rejoice in the person of Jesus Christ who born, lived and died... and through our Creator God is now with us again... (Thomas Long, "Tread Marks and Roses, "Glimpses of Resurrection". *Journal for Preachers, Easter, 2021, p.2*)

Alleluia... Christ has Risen

Christ has Risen.... Hallelujah

And we are here to proclaim that Good Friday has passed and that...Jesus is on the loose!! Alleluia Christ has risen ...

You and I come this Easter morning ... where for over a year now, we ...we have been living in Good Friday... so on this particular Easter day... Easter Day of 2021....we come looking for the Good news ...We are not here to just show off our finery and then off to brunch we go...we are looking for a kind of new life that

helps us see life with a brand new set a eyes... REPEAT...We want to see life in a way that adds to **our** fullness of life... and to the richness of other's lives.

We come looking for a Christ that is present and at work in our lives in places that we can see and experience...REPEAT We come to see the RISEN Christ. We come to see Christ at work in our lives and in the lives of others and maybe even in ways might never imagine.

Pastor and seminary teacher, Kim Young tells story:

“When my husband I lived in Atlanta we worshiped at a church that had bread machines running in the sanctuary on communion Sundays, so we could smell the bread of life, even before it was time to eat it together at Christ's table. Often there was bread left over after church..... on one church ... on such blessed Sunday, I got to take a loaf of it home. This was the perfect loaf of bread- sweet, lightly browned, crusty on the outside and still warm! Yum! Someone was kind enough to put it in bag for me and I carried to the car like it was a baby.... I was so hungry, and this bread was going to be so good!

I got into my car, and I might almost buckled the loaf in the front seat...

I had not gone too far, when I looked ahead, and sitting there on the sidewalk about thirty feet apart from one another were two men... one younger and one older.

They had nothing...no sleeping bags... no pieces of carboard... no backpacks.

And I knew that was going to happen next. I was going to have to give up my sweet loaf of bread, for clearly they needed it more than I did. Reluctantly, I eased over to the curb and came to a stop. I motioned to the younger man, and he leapt up and came over to the car.

“Here” I said, handing him the still warm loaf. “This is for you and the gentlemen to share. He took the bread, said thank you and quickly made his way to the other man. And then, like a priest, he leaned down, he broke the bread and gave half away to the older man.

Take, Bless... break. Give

Right before my very eyes, these two men acted out the Lord's Supper all over again there on a gritty sidewalk in the middle of Atlanta.... It looked like a miracle. (Ibid. p. 3)

The Risen Christ on the loose. PAUSE

So how and where do we see this Jesus... the Jesus who is on the loose... where can you and I...where can we encounter this Risen and Resurrected Jesus in our world today.

Perhaps, as one author suggested, Easter really is all about looking at the world both within us and outside of us with a brand new set of eyes. It is about

seeing our lives and others in a new way... a way that adds to the fullness of our lives and to the richness in the lives of others...

In fact, our faith necessitates... our faith requires that we look at and we see the world in a new and particular way... To be Easter people is to have eyes that see life through the eyes of Christ.... To see life in the way the Risen Christ sees us.

Christian Century Editor, Rev. Dr. Peter Marty writes about a theologian, Nicholas Wolterstorff and his conversation with an obstetrician.. The Doctor was asked how he taught perspective nurses to care properly for mothers, whose babies were still-born or died shortly after birth. "I tell them.", said the physician, "When you go into the room, you need two eyes... With one eye you have to check, the IV...the vitals...the physical health of the patient....with the other eye, you must cry. I tell them one eye is not enough. You need two eyes... you need 2 sets of eyes.... One to care for the medical needs... another for emotionally and spiritual care. (Peter Marty, "A New Set of Eyes, *Journal for Preachers, Easter 2021, p, 37*)

In our lives, too, you and Iwe need 2 sets of eyes... one to look at the world with knowledge/ discernment and critical thinking and one to look at the world with compassion...the eye that shares the grief and pain of others. To be overfocused on the first neglects compassion...simply to see with the eye of the

mind, brings on heartless competence... the eye of the heart without the eye of the mind adds up to mindless empathy. (IBID)

As Christians we need a new set of eyes ...eyes to see life as God intends. As Christians we need those eyes to live in the world... but also to be able to be the hands and feet of Christ TO the world. REPEAT

This IS the way that you... and I are able to be Christ in the world. We don't just come looking for Christ that was risen from the dead but a Christ that comes to us. We also rest assured that Christ comes not only the high and the mighty but God comes to all of us because of his great love for each one of us. God does not do social distancing but God steps into the fray of life REPEAT... into places of death and fear. He comes to tell us that life is not over, God comes to us with eyes of compassion and calls us to go to others that those same eyes.

We Easter People... we too are to see the world with new sets of eyes... seeing Christ and experiencing Christ in life is not just a matter of knowing theology and learning doctrine and a set of beliefs and practicing rituals.... It's a new way of thinking that enables us to see the Risen Christ in the world..... and to be open when he calls us to new ways of thinking, seeing and being..

So we come today with those 2 sets of eyes... 1 critical eye and one compassionate eye... both need to do God's work in the world... both needed to

recognize Christ's working among us and within us... you and I come this morning with those new set of eyes... open to see God's calling to us.

And so this day, like Mary in the resurrection story, we all come looking for the presence of Christ in our lives. And sometimes, it just takes a new way of looking at something old.

If you've ever driven down Ridge Rd past Ontario, right near the Centennial Village, you may have noticed an old cemetery on the North Side of the road.. Some time ago, we were on our way to Webster, on Ridge rd. when right next to that cemetery, I spotted a large sign which read...." Leasing Opportunities Now" Hooa, I thought...now there's a new twist. Leasing a cemetery lot... Hmmm... It did take me a few seconds to realize that the sign did not pertain to the cemetery but a new building located behind the cemetery. I have to say... it did make me smile though.

But then, I got to thinking.... It got me looking with a new set of eyes...

Not only did Jesus have a very short term lease with death, but our Easter story of resurrection reminds us all that Jesus came to give us all not only the permanence of eternal life.... but came to give us a new lease on our life in the here and now.

What you and I we all need then is a new set of eyes to see this all ... if we are to recognize and see Christ moving in our lives

This morning...is a time to remember the resurrection and to remember that it is not only good news, it is the best news possible. If Easter means anything to us, it means you can put the truth in a grave but it won't stay there. You may nail it to the tree, wrap up in grave clothes, and seal it in a tomb. But truth crushed to the earth will rise again. Truth does not perish. It cannot be destroyed. It may be distorted. Life will rise again.

But my guess is we don't come just to hear this story, important as it is. We are not nearly as interested in the first resurrection as we are, way more interested in coming to and wanting to see the risen Christ in our lives As miraculous as and as comforting as it is to know that there is life after death, if there isn't something more, we've missed the gift of eternal life that Jesus offers us on this side of death. We've missed the point that we don't have to wait till we're dead to experience the presence of the risen and living Christ.

And so this day, like Mary, we all come looking for the presence of Christ in our lives. And like Mary, it is not always easy to recognize the gardener when we

see him. It's hard to believe in those things we can't explain, those things we are not expecting, those things that are so foreign to us. And Like the disciples, we, too find it hard to understand the mystery of this most powerful day in our Christian life. PAUSE

Yet Easter Sunday is a reminder to us that there is nothing that God cannot overcome...nothing that God can't turn into something new...and it is in God's possibilities that we have possibilities.

The real message of Easter does not much care for the intellectual.... nor the theological. The message of Easter exceeds our limited reasoning. The message of Easter addresses our hearts and spirits as well as our minds. Easter calls us to our hopes, our aspirations, our passions, as well as our reason. Easter calls us to open wide our eyes and to see life as did Christ

In all our circumstances.. God can resurrect us today.. resurrect us and make something new. God brings hope where there is despair...joy where there is sorrow and peace where there is discord...love where there is hate.

We all flock to churches on this day because there is serious business on our agenda... not an explanation ... but hope in our hearts... and a sense of wonder in our souls.

That is the message of Easter... it is a place that has to be believed to be seen... both in this life and in the life to come. It is not only hope for the future but hope in the here and now.. hope for new life through Christ. And in Christ. what we need is to see it all with a new set of eyes.