

Resurrected Hope

March 27, 2016 – The Resurrection of Our Lord/Easter Sunday (Year C)

First Lutheran Church, St. Peter, MN

Text: Acts 10:34-43, 1 Corinthians 15:19-26, Luke 24:1-12

Alleluia! Christ is risen! (repeat)

Grace and peace to you from God our Creator and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen.

As the women came rushing back into the house, they woke up the disciples, who were probably very groggy. It was barely dawn and none of them had slept very well. Less than 48 hours before, they watched their friend die on a cross – betrayed by one of them, a fellow disciple. But Jesus was more than a friend; he was their teacher, their leader, their hope for a better life. All their dreams, their visions for a better future for their people seemed to die with him. The religious authorities and the Romans won again. They were feeling resigned to the fact that this is how it would always be – they would always be second class citizens in their own land. They would have to get used to one foreign power after another controlling their lives. So when the women came in and were babbling on about something about Jesus body being gone and strange men telling them he was alive? The disciples wanted nothing to do with it. Their hopes had been crushed. And those women, they had to be delirious – in denial about what had happened. It was over – time to move on – get on with life.

And maybe for many of us, this story still seems a delirious tale. Like the disciples, we may have a hard time believing this story of resurrection. We live in a world where we are taught from a young age that ‘if it seems too good to be true, it probably is.’ And we have a pretty good idea of how this world works. We see wars, terrorism, domestic violence, and young people shot on the streets. We see poverty, disease, and hunger. We see divisions in our society like racism, sexism, and homophobia that don’t seem to be healing – including the sexism the

disciples display when they refuse to believe these women. We have seen what happens when we put too much hope in an individual to change things. It's easy to be resigned to how the world works because we live in it – we see it every day. And this resurrection thing? That's not how the world works. At best it's a metaphor. People who die stay dead.

But what if it were true? What if death did not have the final word? What if Jesus really and truly rose from the dead that first Easter morning? Because here we are, nearly two millennia later, once again celebrating Christ's resurrection – the exact story the disciples regarded as an “idle tale”. Celebrating that love is stronger than hate and life can overcome death. Celebrating the divine mystery that God works in ways the world does not understand.

I admit it's not easy to accept. But as one theologian said, “If you don't find resurrection at least a little hard to believe, you probably aren't taking it very seriously!” This isn't just a nice story; this is a fundamental change in how things work. This is God acting in the world in ways that we don't expect and don't make sense. Resurrection is inherently subversive, defying the forces of the world and giving hope where there is none. Another theologian writes, “If the dead don't stay dead, what can you count on?” Resurrection dramatically and permanently alters the world – the old rules don't apply anymore. God is creating a new way, just as God has done throughout history.

When the men in dazzling clothes spoke to the women at the tomb, they invited them to remember – remember what Jesus said, remember his ministry, remember what God has done in the past. Jesus' entire ministry was a preview of the resurrection, of the hope that he brings, of God's new way that flies in the face of accepted norms. Jesus spent his life feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and reaching out to those rejected by society. He showed the world that God's love knows no boundaries.

Last night, Christians around the world gathered for the Great Vigil of Easter, just as we did here at First Lutheran. One of the hallmarks of the Vigil is retelling as many as 12 stories of God's redemptive work from our scriptures. We remembered how God created the world and humanity and called it good. We remembered how God saved the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. We remembered how God freely offers love and salvation to all people. And we remembered how we have been baptized into Christ's death and Christ's resurrection. And at the climax of these stories, we remembered how Jesus Christ rose from the dead – a continuation of God's story in the world and our story in God. Through all these stories, we remembered that God works in ways we don't expect. That rather than conforming to the world's expectations, God works through new, exciting, and mysterious means.

This is why I need the resurrection to be true. I need to have something to believe in that is greater than what I see in the news or on the streets. I need something to hope in that says that the brokenness of the world will not prevail – that love will conquer hate and life will overcome death. That the violence will some day end. That partisan gridlock and rancor is not the ultimate reality. That all systems of oppression will be dismantled. That some day, death will finally be defeated. And no, Christ's resurrection will not bring this new world today and probably not tomorrow, but it gives me the hope to believe that it will happen. It gives me hope that God works in the middle of the darkest and most broken parts of the world to bring about God's vision of peace, justice, and light.

And to me, that's one of the most powerful things about Easter, that amid all the violence, death, and destruction in the world, we still gather, as we have for 2000 years, to celebrate that God still works in a new, exciting, and mysterious way. That God is at work even when it's hard to see or even to have hope.

The disciples had a hard time believing the resurrection that first Easter morning. The people who knew Jesus best couldn't believe that he was alive. But we know that this was not their final statement. We know that they came to believe in the new thing God was doing through resurrection. And we know that they spent the rest of their lives proclaiming that resurrection through their words, their acts of service, and their love. We as Christians are an Easter people, united in one body through Christ's resurrection, and we are called to embody God's resurrection in the world. To bring hope to the lost, serve without partiality, and love each person as a fellow child of God. To proclaim the new, exciting, and mysterious thing God is still doing today and live into the resurrection that we share in Christ Jesus.

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

Thanks be to God!