

## **Easter Sunday April 9 2023**

### **Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 28:1-10**

The women went to the tomb on that first day of the week expecting to find death. They go to the tomb filled with disappointment and deep sorrow. There are no Easter lilies or tulips along the way. No trumpets and brass, no candy left in a basket. It was two women going to the tomb of a beloved friend to do the last act of love for him. Anoint his battered and broken body for its final rest. A goodbye, an honor, defiance to those who had taken his life.

They go expecting to find death. And why not, for that is how the world works, eh? Something we know all too well. School shootings in Nashville and Uvalde. War between Ukraine and Russia. At least 1.1 million Americans dead of COVID. Rising levels of teens with serious mental distress. The powers of sin/death/ the devil and all the forces that defy God at work in hatred, division, violence, death, hopelessness, cynicism, apathy.

The women go to the tomb expecting to find death. But God surprises them. As God does. The earthquake was as much figurative as literal. Their very conception of how the world worked changed with their discovery of the empty tomb. The

ground underneath their feet moved in powerful, real, and disconcerting ways.

Because sin, death, and all the forces that defy God did not win. Were not stronger than God. Instead of a dead body, here was Jesus, standing before them. That same smile of his, a bit crooked on one side. That same gaze that seemed to look right through you, seeing the real you, not in an invasive way, but loving, accepting, Jesus. Alive! Alleluia! Praise be to God!

Friends, I do not doubt the witness of those women, those first apostles of Jesus- sent to tell the good news to his other disciples. I do not doubt that they and others saw the risen Jesus- as Peter testifies to in front of the crowd. For what else could have sustained those frightened, broken followers? What else but the power of God in the risen Jesus could have fueled the growth of the followers of Jesus to become the largest religion on earth?

It is the power of God's steadfast love for us that defeats sin/death/the devil and all the forces that defy God every time. God's unbounded love for the whole world is so great that God will give up anything for you. Yes you. Just as you are, right now. Because God loves you. Beautifully made in God's image

with gifts, skills, abilities, interests unique to you in the whole world. Fearfully and wonderfully made.

Friends, the resurrection, the witness of the women from the tomb, of Peter and the other apostles since that day until now all show us that we need Jesus. We need Jesus, because we cannot save ourselves from sin/death/the devil and all the forces that defy God. From hatred, division, the impulse to violence and so much more that plague us humans. I know I sure can't and the witness of the world around us makes that case well. That on our own, life is not all that it can be. That is why we need Jesus.

We need Jesus as example, yes. A model of forgiveness, even of those who hurt us, "Father forgive them, they do not know what they are doing." Of patience, listen in the gospels how many times Jesus goes back over things with the disciples when they just can't see. "How many loaves do you have?" Of love unbounded- for those on the fringes of society (lepers, tax collectors, Samaritan women) and for those with power (Nicodemus, a Roman Centurion, Jairus- the leader of the synagogue). Love for those who are sick in body (the man born blind, the man paralyzed, the woman with the flow of blood) Love for those who are sick in spirit (the Gerasene demoniac, the man in the synagogue). As Peter bore witness, Jesus' life was to go

about “doing good and healing all who are oppressed by the devil.” Love for everyone lived out.

We need Jesus because God acted through him- to raise him from the dead. We cannot resurrect ourselves. We need Jesus because the Holy Spirit came to us through him. In water splashed, word spoken, bread and wine eaten. We need Jesus because even the disciples couldn’t figure out who Jesus was on their own. They could hang out with him, of course. Hear him preach and teach. See him heal and counsel. Witness his calm power in the face of opposition. See him go off to pray after long sessions of serving others. But they still couldn’t figure it out until the Holy Spirit sparked that thought in Peter, “You are the Messiah!” And even then, they still couldn’t get it all figured out. Not until this moment. Seeing the resurrected Christ.

Now, some may think it all so much superstitious mumbo jumbo. Dead men don’t rise. Jesus has some fine teachings, but that’s all it is. Some may believe that they can do just fine without Jesus and especially his problematic church.

I freely admit, we in the church are not always the best bearers of Christ’s name. We do not always bring honor to that name in our words and actions. We are, indeed, imperfect followers of Jesus. That’s why we need Jesus. But, when we are at our best,

when we stick to telling the old, old, story- of Jesus and our own encounter with him. Just like Peter does in Acts. How he has come into our lives and changed them. How he has walked with us through the valley of the shadow of death. How he has healed our lives. How he has sustained us in the midst of strife. When we bear that witness, when we bring Jesus and his love into their presence in our words and actions, then people find life. Fuller and more abundant. I have heard that witness time and again. I have seen it. Many in this room have experienced it themselves.

We need Jesus to do that. Jesus who helps us to forgive, even those who hurt us. Not to seek vengeance when they ignore our rights, our needs. But instead to feel compassion. To seek to understand. To love. Only love can conquer hate. Jesus taught us that.

We need Jesus to help us love those on the fringes of our society: the transgendered, the homeless, the hungry, the poor. Love them by treating them as those created in the image of God. With compassion, with patience, seeking to understand even as we meet their needs.

We need Jesus to help us love those in power: politicians of all parties, business owners, the super-rich. To love them for who

they are, created in the image of God. To remind them of who they are called to be, to serve.

We need Jesus to heal the sick- as we sit by the bedside of those with cancer, as we support and advocate for those with mental illness, as we stay with, abide with, all those in need of healing.

We need Jesus, because only with him, by him, through him can we love others as he has loved us. And this is how people will know we are his disciples. Not by correct doctrine, or worshipping the right way, or praying the right prayer. They will know we are his disciples by our? Love. As we love our neighbors and one another as he has loved us. Without boundaries, without reservation, fully and completely.

We need Jesus, because only his Abba can resurrect what seems dead. We need Jesus, because his love is the only thing that will conquer fear, hatred, and death. We need Jesus, for in him alone and the God who raised him from the dead can we find the life we want. Fuller, more abundant. Filled with grace, love, mercy, kindness. With community that loves one another regardless of who you are.

We need Jesus, and thanks be to God, we have him. Alive. Not dead in a tomb, locked in the past. We have Jesus. Alive. Emmanuel, God with us. Now. In this moment and this place. And always- out there, as we leave, tomorrow, next week. Next month. Next year. Until the end. Loving us, all of us.

Alleluia, Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

Thanks be to God.