

Ser21-9 The Blessing of Being Fully Alive! 4-4-21 Easter Sunday TUCC
The Blessings of Easter; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; John 20:1-18

Preaching a Resurrection Day sermon. Indeed, I miss Good Friday sermons on one of the 7 last words from the cross. **A good Friday sermon is easier because we are far more familiar with suffering and death than with resurrection. Resurrection is so difficult from so many angles that most Christians are content to think of it as something that happens after we die.**" and I would offer that Resurrection Sunday tries its best to tell us that being a follower of Jesus, indeed, being a Christian is not about what happens in the afterlife; it's about what happens in this life, even about what happens today.

BBT, once overheard a student in her Religion 101 class saying: "I love studying other religions, because they have so much in them about how to live. This is different from Christianity, which seems to be only about going to heaven when you die."

My friends, based on the story in John's gospel, I don't believe that's what Resurrection Day has for us. The disciples – Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John, came to the tomb to grieve – They were grieving undoubtedly for all that could have been – if only Jesus were still alive! Disciples would still follow him in doing great things for the poor and oppressed.

I discovered something quite interesting in my studies this week. The idea of resurrection of the dead in the Hebrew scriptures will surprise you as it surprised me. Theologians say **"the stories of raising the dead in the Hebrew bible have nothing to do with immortality—nothing to do with going to heaven. They are about God's justice." "To restore a dead person to life is to strike a blow at mortality, but to restore a crucified person to life is to strike a blow at the system that executed that person."**

This is the understanding of the bible that Jesus grew up with, you see. So, **"To bring a dead one back to life meant that God's reign was very**

near. And if God's reign was very near, then the reign of the powerful and evil empire (those who crucified Jesus) was very nearly over."

So, you might ask then, "what was the meaning of the empty tomb to Mary Mag. and Peter and the Other Disciple? --- that God's justice was on the move. Not just in heaven but right here on earth. Oh, but if that would be the real meaning for us on this Resurrection day...April 4, 2021. That God's Kingdom is on the move....and that we are alive enough to be part of that movement.

The disciples had a right to be afraid...Mary Magd. Had a right to want to cling to Jesus as she encounters him in the garden. They had come for a funeral – not for a revolution. They had come to grieve – not to organize a movement. = a movement that would transform an evil, anger empire to one of hope and compassion.

They had come to grieve – and the others – we will discover later on in the weeks to come – had already gone back to their own dead and boring lives. "They must have known somehow that they had lost more than a beloved friend. They had lost their best hope for a new kind of life on earth."

But now that Jesus is dead – and even worse, his body is missing from the tomb, their lives have less meaning, their future less hopeful. His death diminishes their own lives. Why? Because, when Jesus was alive, they could imagine a world: (√) where children had enough to eat; (√) sick people got well (√) old people didn't have to worry about who would care for them; When Jesus spoke, you could imagine a world in which:

- women were worth talking to and listening to;
- lepers could throw away their warning bells;
- and people living in the middle of no-where could find themselves at a picnic with 5, 000 other people, with baskets of food left over.
- the soldiers of the empire WERE NOT controlling and killing the lives of innocent people, families and their children;
- Children were loved and welcomed and not abused; and

- peace and love would reign overall.

The disciples and people of a ruthless Roman empire lived in a world that was “bent on crushing the human spirit in the pursuit of control.” We don’t have to work too hard to imagine that the cries of the people of Jesus day lie just below the surface of some of the major currents in our own culture and world –

Oh, to imagine a world where: repeat...

- individuals, neighborhoods, even nations, cease settling their differences through violence; --yet the thirst for more guns—more powerful guns and bombs expands daily;
- a compassion strong enough that would bring real and affordable healthcare to everyone, especially the poor, the working poor and children who are often turned away;
- an economy in which there is no fighting over all working people getting an adequate and livable wage – not a country where the rich get rich faster, and the bottom falls out of the neighborhood;
- the mad pursuit of profit and greed is overcome by the desire for all people to have a good life;
- being a spiritual friend is more important than having our individual freedom to do as we choose...

The church, indeed, the Christian church – those of us gathered here and all the other places you are worshipping with us...FB..this resurrection day are called to let go of all the ways we kill these dreams. Do we have enough hope and courage to do the work the living Christ calls us to do? To receive and share the blessings of being fully alive.

The one the disciples loved and followed is dead....worse than that. His body is gone. They were coming to mourn their dead hope. They were there to grieve their lost future – to lay to rest their dead vision of the way life could have been.

So, Mary Mag came and found the tomb open and empty. She ran and found Peter and Peter brought the beloved disciples; they came and explored the empty tomb. And the male disciples went home again. But Mary lingered while. I wonder if Mary Mag. knew something different and unusual was about to happen to her and to the world. And she was right.

And then he speaks her Name, "Mary>" and she knows him...she is awakened from her grief. She is awakened from her own dead life to the possibility of something different after all. And like any of us, she apparently reaches out to touch him, and Jesus says, "do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended..." Let me go to be with the one who sent me...and the even greater news is that even as I go, HOPE IS ALIVE; MY MISSION IS STILL ALIVE RIGHT HERE ON EARTH..." That is what Mary is to go and tell the disciples.

Jesus comes to show them & US how to live – fully alive – in the face of death undone by a loving and resurrecting God. **for Jesus to complete the example of love and forgiveness he showed even on the cross he had to appear again to the disciples who had betrayed him....to show them and us the power of his forgiving spirit....**Maybe, just maybe, they too would grasp that God's action on resurrection day was about jump-starting a movement, a movement, a revolution of love that overcomes hate. A revolution of peace that overcomes killing; a revolution of plenty that overcomes poverty; a revolution of joy that overcomes sorrow; a revolution of unity that overcomes brokenness and racial division; a revolution of life – resurrected life – that overcomes death. May this revolution be so in your lives and in mine today.

Amen.