

## **From the Pulpit of Trinitarian Congregational Church...**

Easter Sunday, April 5, 2015

Preacher: Rev. Julie Olmsted

Sermon: Living Easter

After the miraculous birth; after the auspicious religious beginnings as a boy, after the miracles, the ministry, the teaching...the parade. After the poignant and bittersweet Last Supper, the betrayal; after the prayers, the capture, the torture... After all of this: the quiet and awful finality of death. After the tears, the outcries, the anguish, the guilt, the wind, the darkness, the eeriness of the sky, the long and too painful to bear walk home. Nothingness. Quiet. A hole in the heart. The now silent cry becomes not, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But, My God, My God, what have we done? What have we done....to you? To think, that the most exquisite expression of God's love, wisdom and power could be murdered in such an unthinkable way. It was too horrible to accept. Yet.... there the women were, ready (as always) to do what must be done. The mundane follows the dramatic: a body to wash, to wrap, to prepare for at least a decent burial.

Imagine yourself on that Easter Morning. Imagine the sunrise, the quiet, the soft blue green light of dawn. Roosters crow, birds sing, candles are beginning to be lit in windows. How can it be? Like a song of early sixties, "How can the birds go on singing? How can the sea rush to shore? Don't they know, it's the end of the world? 'Cause you don't love me (or in this case, you don't live here) anymore?" You are walking to the tomb, heavy hearted, but resigned. You think to yourself, "How can we do this? How can we possibly do this?" But you must. It's the right thing to do. You are walking. You come closer. You squint in the breaking sunlight to see more clearly. You look more intently. It can't be, but it certainly seems.....My God, someone has rolled away the stone! What could it mean? Grave robbers? How could they? Hasn't he suffered enough for your cruel and hardened hearts? Your heart begins to beat faster, but your pace slows. You want to see and you don't want to see. Your mind cannot quite get around this unsettling sight. But you approach, with caution and fear. What has happened? It is inevitable that you will know now. You enter slowly, barely breathing. And the unbelievable is facing you. Your heart is stuck somewhere between your throat and your stomach. This does not make sense. This cannot be. He is gone.

Not only is he gone, but there is a heavenly messenger telling you, the body was not stolen, but as a matter of awesome, incredible and heart stopping fact, he is alive. He

is out and about. They did not kill him! Kill God? Stomp out life itself? Squelch the power of love? NO WAY!

In the original version of the book of Mark verse 8, it ends by simply saying that the women were afraid. They were afraid because what had happened had completely assaulted and undone their fragile grip on reality. What had transpired, although promised, derailed their sense of logic, their understanding of life itself. This was, in effect, beyond space and time. You live, you die, that's it. Or...not.

There is such cruelty in the world. Always has been. (I won't say "always will be," I am willing to be surprised). Cruelty, bullying, mob mentality, hearsay that masquerades as truth. And cruelty begets more cruelty, which can incite rioting and hysteria, which bring about chaos, which stimulates an iron and sometimes cruel hand to "keep the peace." And so the cycle continues. But with Jesus it was different. It was different because he was different. He was wisdom. He was truth. He was so filled with the pure light of God, we called him the Son of God. And he called us the sons and daughters of God. He was our brother, our friend, and (perhaps most importantly) our way out of this cycle of attack and defense and attack, which brings about pain and suffering without end.

People were cruel to him, people challenged his authority, they trashed his authenticity, they smeared his reputation, they trivialized his power, they ignored his promise, and they denied their relationship to him. Have you ever felt any of those things? How could they do it? Didn't they know who he was? They.... or we? See, this Easter story, it is our story. We are capable of all these things. We have different agendas for our lives, different takes on the truths, different interpretations of scripture, different ways of living it, or not living it. But we can all participate, in some way or another, in the crucifixion. But you and I, those of us here this morning, we are the Easter people. We can participate in the crucifixion. Or the resurrection. I choose the resurrection. I believe in Easter! This morning I would like us to try and see the resurrection as something much more than an event. I would like us to see it as a reality, the reality that Jesus demonstrated to the world (in his life and his death). I would like for us to see it as the context for living our lives. Because we are the Easter people! **WE ARE THE EASTER PEOPLE!!!**

See, Jesus responded to attack, not with his own personal agenda, but with the power of God throughout his crucifixion ordeal. And so can you and I. Because, people will treat us poorly. We will be overlooked. We will be sidelined, ignored, betrayed, bullied, tried, convicted, sentenced to something that is unpleasant, at the very least. Some of us more than others. But we can affirm anytime and all times: "We are the Easter people!" We believe in resurrection! They can't kill God and they can't kill

me! Because I belong to God. By aligning myself with this power, I receive the benefits. And that is awesome. Can you imagine living your life with this kind of response to any difficulty? See, Easter people just can't be kept down. And that, by the way, is the radiant value of the church: We are one body, the Body of Christ. And when one of us is not well, the other steps in to be strong. When one of us is absent, ten more of us are present. When one of us loses our way, another one gets him or her back on track. But when we respond to one another with enmity and attack, when one of us withdraws behind an "enemy line," our body is ailing. The church is God's gift of life after the Resurrection. The Easter People come alive every Sunday. The Easter People find grace, beauty, love and possibility in everything, including the cross.

## **Easter Sunrise Service**

**April 5, 2015**

**Munn's Ferry Road**

Have you ever been unkind to another person and have them do nothing to "get you back?" Have you ever uttered a hurtful comment to someone, and had them do nothing but continue behaving as if nothing happened at all, in fact, they were nicer to you than before? What are you left with? You are left with the nastiness of your own intentions. Sometimes you cannot even believe it. Your sense of reality is challenged in a very small way. Did I say what I thought I said? Did that person hear me? Is she deaf? Dumb? Stupid? Or.... did she just turn the other cheek? When we can transcend the negative actions of others and remain peaceful, aware of the beauty of life, and still tuned into the heart of the offender, not losing power, beyond the insults, beyond their fears, their malintentions, indeed their own hurts and ignorance, we can see a bit of the many sparkling facets of the resurrection. You can't believe that they would not defend themselves. You are left with the bare bones and uncomfortable reality of your own error, or your own sin.

He never defended himself. Could he have? Of course. He could have taken aside his favorite disciple and said something like, "Look, I'm going to go through with this charade and watch what I do afterward." He could have told those who delivered him to be crucified "You guys are making a big mistake!" He could have pleaded his case, incited the wrath of his followers, and perhaps have caused Pilate to retract his sentence. He could have commanded nature to obey him (for remember, he had walked on water), and risen above the crowd with great theatrics and fanfare. He could have plotted an escape and quietly slipped out of town and lived the rest of his life in anonymity, teaching a privileged and confidential few, who were sworn to secrecy.

But Jesus did none of these things. He served as a mirror for all humanity. All that those who crucified him were left with was the enormity of their wrongdoing. If he had defended himself, there would have been more conflict, more accusation, more back and forth drama and conflict. But he completed his task. Like a sponge, he absorbed all the badness of the world. It couldn't get much worse, certainly. One would think that this kind of death would absolutely be final. But it wasn't, was it? The sins of humanity were nailed to the cross that day. Now what that means is, you and I can accept that we are not guilty anymore. We are freed. Our sentence is commuted. It is done. We have been released (hallelujah!). Because, as God himself so loved the world, he gave the best of himself to be a light that could overcome all darkness. And once we let go of our own darkness (for God certainly has, as proven by Jesus himself), we can see beyond our fears, beyond our guilt, beyond the conflict inside ourselves. How do we do that? We look to him. And we can see something that is beyond what is logical, beyond what is believable, beyond even cause and effect, to grace. Grace is that distance between what we think we deserve and what God has in store for us. Open arms. Beauty. Eternal life. It never ends, this mystery: this ongoing, never-ending, truly awesome cycle of birth, growth, death and rebirth. If we get quiet enough, if we think broadly and deeply and outside our personal concerns and identity, if we look into the buzz of nature, the steady rise and fall of the tides... If we look at the heartbreakingly joyful outbreak of spring that has come for millennia, we will hear God's song, as sung so sweetly by our Lord, for truly he was our Lord. The song goes something like this, I am with you.....I am with you.....I am alive.....I will never, ever leave you.....This is the Truth that is beyond stories, beyond religions, beyond the physical body of Jesus of Nazareth, the Truth that defies all logic and personal belief: God is alive, God is in our hearts, and we are in the heart of God. Love cannot die, and light will always, always shine away the dark. Although our minds tell us it cannot be so, there is another voice, very still and quiet, but never ever ceasing, like a heartbeat, it is chanting in our hearts, whispering throughout the universe: Believe it, my beloved, believe it.