

4/21/2019

“Believing”

Scripture: John 20:1-18; (Luke 19:28-40)

Series: With All Your Heart

Theme: Our hearts are turned from despair to joy this day as we believe and celebrate the risen Christ with us, within us, and among us!

As we have returned to God with all our hearts this past Lenten Season, today we celebrate our Lord’s resurrection! And yet, the day of Christ’s resurrection began in darkness for those who loved him. Not just the darkness of night, but the darkness of sorrow, death and despair.

† **Like those closest to Jesus at his death, we will at times have heavy hearts. At times we may even feel like we are living in death ourselves.**

As the Revs. Todd & Jennifer Pick reflect on the gospel account from John:

“The story of resurrected hearts and new life begins early in the morning, just before dawn. In the stillness, in the darkness, Mary made her way to the place of death. Probably carrying spices to anoint Jesus’ body, she persisted through the darkness; persisted in doing the necessary work of preparing him for burial. Her beloved One—the one who healed the sick, offered forgiveness of sins, and gave new life within the reign of God—was dead. And in the stillness, in the darkness, she made her way to a stone of shattered dreams and broken hearts.”

Yes, we have finally made it to Easter! And again this year, we tell and hear the same story. With some variations of accounts, there are still the gaping tomb, confused mourners, unexpected and unbelievable encounters with angels, and ultimately with the risen Jesus himself.

As Todd & Jennifer Pick affirm . . .

“Every year, the story moves us along from searching in sadness, to shocking disbelief, and finally to joy. And every year, we meet the challenge at the heart of Easter Sunday: to persist through fear and darkness, to believe beyond what we think we know, to welcome Christ in unexpected places and faces. Every year, we decide if we will allow our hearts to be transformed by the promise and the very presence of Christ; if we will trust in our own coming into life again and again. But it isn’t just once a year that

we get to decide. Every day, every day, you must decide whether hope is stronger than despair, whether love is stronger than death. That's what this story is about."

So, what doubts, fears or sorrows do you face or deal with in life? What hopes and desires for a new or restored life, or a better world, do you still hold within your heart? Are you ready and willing to allow your heart and life to be transformed, renewed or revived by the promise and presence of the risen Christ?!

If so, then believe and receive the good news!

† **For those who hear and believe, the power of Christ's resurrection brings new and everlasting life!**

Remember the words of Jesus to Martha shortly before his final entry into Jerusalem, after the death of her brother Lazarus. On his arrival in their town of Bethany, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. . . .

*"When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "**I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?**" "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." (John 11:20-27 NIV)*

Just as Jesus raised Lazarus from death, so now his own resurrection proved the power of the Holy Spirit in him. And whoever lives believing in him and in his resurrection, will always be spiritually alive!

Remember Mary Magdalene, who came with a broken heart, not yet knowing what had happened to the body of Jesus. And likewise with the other women, after encountering two angels in the form of men as Luke tells it, who remembered and believed the words of Jesus.

". . .that 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" (Luke 24:7 NIV)

Remember the two disciples who ran to the tomb, hearts pounding, and who went back to their homes "believing," but not understanding.

Remember God's messengers (angels) who sat among discarded grave cloths and questioned Mary's tears.

Remember the risen Christ who stayed long enough in the garden, so Mary wouldn't be alone in her confusion and fear. She does not recognize him at first. But, he calls Mary's name and at once transforms her broken heart to a burning heart.

And remember how Mary went back to the ones she loved and proclaimed with wonder and joy on that first Resurrection Sunday morning, "I have seen the Lord!"

Remember and believe! God can bring life in our darkest times, even in the face of death... As the new day rises with the dawn, so does our life in the spirit, as we put our hope and trust in the Lord! Even earthly death is not an end, only a transition to life everlasting with God for those who believe in Him.

Just this week I had the sadness and joy of remembering and celebrating this truth with my extended family of origin in the passing of an uncle whom I loved.

† **The resurrection of Jesus is not the end of the story but the beginning of many hoped-filled risings to come.**

No matter what you or your loved one's current situation or condition, believe and know that God is watching over you. God is still with you! Just when you think the story may be over, God has another page, another chapter in mind for you. Believe and have faith. Put your whole trust in God.

To paraphrase the Picks . . . Because the Love of God will come, again and again (and again!), to raise us out of death, we have hope. It's just a whisper now, but if you sit in the stillness and the darkness, you can hear it calling you to rise. (ibid.)

Let us affirm as they do . . . "We turn our hearts with hope this day to meet the risen Christ with us, within us, and within the love between us; within the unexpected that inspires us. We acknowledge that God is with us in our birthing, our living, our dying, and our rising again. Then, like Mary, we must each decide whether hope is stronger than fear, whether life is stronger than hate, and whether love really is stronger than death . . . every day, every moment, with all our hearts. That is what resurrection is."

So, friends, have you come to believe in Christ's resurrection? I am sure many have. But if not, what questions or doubts do you still have? If so, how has it changed you?

Like Mary, Peter and others, let us share the good news that Jesus is alive! Let others know the difference he has made -- and continues to make -- through our thoughts, feelings, words and actions, as we believe and celebrate the risen Christ with us, within us, and among us!

Every time you share a word of concern and hope, you are helping someone believe.

Every time you take time to just be present and listen to someone going through a difficult time or situation, you are helping someone believe.

Every time you lend a helping hand, you are helping someone believe.

Every time you extend hospitality to a stranger, you are helping someone believe.

Every time you stand for justice and mercy, you are helping someone believe.

And every time you help someone believe that life is worth living, here and in the life to come, you are sharing the good news of the Risen Christ Jesus with them. It is the beginning of hope-filled risings of all who believe. Thanks & glory be to God!

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Questions for Reflection:

What doubts, fears or sorrows do you face or deal with in life?

Have you come to believe in Christ's resurrection? If not, what questions or doubts do you still have? If so, how has it changed you?