

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
 East Moline, Illinois
 Pastor Becky Sherwood
April 17, 2022, Easter Sunday
 Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Matthew 28:1-10
WITH FEAR AND GREAT JOY

"Good is stronger than evil;
 love is stronger than hate;
 light is stronger than darkness;
 life is stronger than death.
 Victory is ours, through Christ who loves us."

These words from Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa are words of promise for each
 one of us, who gather this morning,
 believing that the cross of Good Friday and the tomb of Easter Sunday morning
 are both empty, and
 that Christ is Risen Indeed!

We need this Easter morning message.
 I need it, you need it, our world needs it.
 We need it because it is the truest message of hope we have.
 We need to be reminded of the power of hope this morning.

In our church, and in our families, and around the globe this has been a year of
 deaths,
 profound illnesses,
 the second year of the pandemic,
 war and the rumors of wars,
 life changes,
 and many painful goodbyes to life as we have known it.
 And into the midst of
 that sorrow,
 that loss,
 that change
 and that grief,
 the resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ speaks hope, and new life, and healing
 through God's love.

Not only do we need hope, but our world in its brokenness longs for hope as well.
 In a world where nations continue to invade each other,
 terrorism flourishes,
 the age-old degradation of slavery is a modern-day problem,
 where political beliefs have divided and shattered families, friendship and communities,
 and the children of our world are still dying from hunger and treatable childhood diseases,
 we are people who need hope.

And into what seems like a world that has been broken by evil and hatred and division
 the empty cross and the empty tomb speak another story,

This Easter morning story is the story of the Messiah Jesus who came from God to show the world then,
and the world now,
and to show each one of us gathered here this morning,
that God is with us, always.
And nothing, nothing can stop the love that Jesus has for us.
Nothing!

The Easter story is the story of Love that is stronger than all that is broken;
Love that cannot be stopped, even by illness and death, and division and change;
Love that is light shining even in the darkest tomb;
Love that breaks out of the tomb and shows us a new way,
where joy cannot be silenced, even in the midst of fear.

Life sometimes leaves us feeling like Mary Magdalene and the other Mary coming to the tomb:
We believe that hope has died,
we believe that new life is impossible,
we aren't even sure how we can go on,
or how our world as we know it can go on.

But if we take the risk those two women took long ago, and walk toward the sealed tomb of Friday,
we too will discover the Easter truth that the stone has been rolled away and the tomb is empty.
Jesus has risen as he said,
and life has been changed forever.

The women saw the empty tomb, and the angel sent them to tell the rest of the disciples of the good news.
What is powerful in Matthew's telling of the resurrection story is that he says that the women left the tomb, "with fear and great joy."
"Fear and great joy."

For many of us even as we stand at the empty tomb this morning, we too know fear and great joy.

Even on this joyous Easter morning we still have the same concerns, our lives are still affected by the illnesses and deaths and uncertainties and changes of this year.

But in the presence of the risen Christ there is also joy.
Great Joy that we are not alone in our grief,
Great Joy that we are loved by our God who has walked the valley of the shadow of death ahead of us, and waits in the valley for us whenever we enter it,
Great Joy that our loved ones who have died are held in the promised resurrection to eternal life we see in Jesus' rising.
Great Joy that God's love is stronger than all that tries to defeat us,
Great Joy that world's evil and hatred and division seen in the crucifixion of Jesus do not have the final word.
Great joy, that Jesus is the Light that shines in the darkness and the darkness has never put it out. Never!

We see these truths in a story I read about the funeral service of Winston Churchill:

“...At the close of the service that Churchill planned himself,
 a single trumpeter stood at the west end of St. Paul’s Abby
 and sounded “Taps,”
 the song that signals dusk and the close of another day
 and is frequently played at the end of a military funeral.

But after a moment of stillness that followed the last plaintive note of that song,
 another trumpeter stood at the east end of St. Paul’s,
 the end that faced the rising sun,
 and played “Reveille,”
 the song of the morning and the call to a new day.”

In the words of David Lose, the preaching professor who told this story:

“Churchill perceived, you see,
 that Christ’s resurrection signals above and beyond all else
 that our God is a God of new life and never-ending possibility.
 The good news of Christ’s resurrection does not take away our fear
 -- though sometimes we wish desperately that it would –
 but it does offer us courage and hope by
 anchoring us in the sure promise that
 God will have the last word,
 and that that word is one of
 light and life
 and grace and mercy
 and love and peace.”

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?m=4377&post=3174>

"Good is stronger than evil;
 love is stronger than hate;
 light is stronger than darkness;
 life is stronger than death.

Victory is ours, through the resurrected Christ (him) who loves us."

Christ is Risen, He is Risen Indeed!
 Amen and Amen.

(See SER-4-20-14)