

Sermon April 17 2022 Easter Brent

SCRIPTURE:

Luke 24:1-7:

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women that had come with Jesus from Galilee came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again."

Luke 24:8-12:

Then the women remembered the words of Jesus, and returning from the tomb, they told all that had happened to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

SERMON: "But... Hope!" The Rev. Brent Damrow

While the bell choir was playing "Thine is the Glory" just now, suddenly it was snowing but good! As I looked around at your faces, I thought what can you do but laugh? Theologians have written that Easter, in some ways, is God's best joke on humanity. Just when the powers of the world thought they had done all they could do, just when empire rose up to show who was in charge, just when they thought they were done with this guy named Jesus, God showed them another way. So normally on a spring day like this, snow would bum me out. But today, it makes me happy to see that snow!

We are decked in white paraments today to remember that Easter is a great day. It is a holy day. It is a day when we remember how familiar and timeworn traditions meet unexpected beginnings, and everything changes. This is the day we celebrate how amidst the depths of the human condition, amidst the real truth of grief and loss, of mourning and fear, also always comes love. Comes amazement. Comes new life. Comes new beginnings. Comes hope, and deeper understanding.

Easter changes its day every year. And yet, however elusive it tries to be, we still find our Sunday best, kids put on bow ties, we adorn our heads with flowers. At the earlier outdoor service this morning, you missed two of the best Easter hats I've ever seen. We get all decked out to remember a deep truth.

I think at the heart of today, it's not just a great celebration of what happened 2,000 years ago. But it is at the depth of what is the human condition. Right now, there are those in the world who will paint our current headlines with famine and war and despair and grief. It's all just part of human nature. But here in places like this, with people like us, we remember a deeper truth, an earlier truth. That is the yearning that we don't want to just exist. We don't breathe just to take up space on this planet. But we live to thrive. We were created to live out loud. We were created to walk tall.

We don't breathe just to draw breath. We remember that the very first time that word *ruach* was used in the Bible, it was used in the story of creation. God animated us with God's own *ruach*, with God's own breath, with God's own Spirit. And do you remember what Genesis says at the end of all that creating and breathing, what the world was? Do you remember? Can you tell me? It was *good*! In fact, at the end of it, when God saw all of it, when God saw the land and the animals, the sky and the seas, and humanity all together, it wasn't just good. Do you remember? On that last day before God rested, God saw that it was *very good*!

We, in the DNA of who we are, are created to be people who are very good, who exist in a love affair with God and neighbor, who are turned outward with the hope that we can share in this beautiful thing called life.

I want you to think for a moment. When was the last time that you were caught by surprise by a small act of goodness? Maybe in the way that someone cared for someone else. Do you remember that time? Do you remember, maybe, your heart skipping for a moment? Do you remember a time when someone was brave and courageous, when somebody stood in a place of danger, and broke down a barrier so that someone else might have a more full life? Do you remember such a moment? It may have given you shivers up your spine. Do you remember, whether you saw in person or on TV, that story of when a human being who jumped into a river to save a stranger, or stepped in front of a car or somehow lifted a car off someone who was a complete stranger to them? And maybe you were awe-inspired.

Do you remember the last time you heard a really good teaching – maybe a TED talk, maybe a podcast, maybe something even better? The kind of teaching that left you astounded and amazed. The kind of teaching that left you clamoring for more. The kind of teaching that maybe even changed how you look at yourself or the world, or even better yet, both together. If you don't, start looking and listening. Start paying attention. Because those stories are out there all over the place.

And the story of Easter is embedded in those truths. For on that morning, people just like you and me did things the world would never have expected. People then faced enormous odds to discover great things. And I think I know the reason why. On that Sunday so long ago, those women, the ones who had stuck around faithfully to watch Christ take his last breaths on the cross, which would have been agonizing and painful, those same women who rushed home to prepare the spices and the ointments that they would use, those same women at the first moment they could when the Sabbath was over and light was coming up, they could have stayed in bed, they could have pulled the covers over their head, but they didn't. They got out of bed. They went to honor, to care for and love someone whose body they had seen being beaten and

whipped and stripped and tortured, until breath no longer came, and heart slowed to a whisper and stopped. They knew what the world told them to do, and they remembered how much they loved him. They remembered how much they had seen him preach and teach and heal and feed. And so, somehow they got out of bed, and they went, assuming it would be the last thing they could do for him, for the one who had given his life, even if it would have been easier to stay at home.

Do you know why I think they went? These women didn't just hear about Jesus. These women didn't know Jesus just from a headline. These women knew Jesus by heart. They had spent years with him. And they had seen someone who lived out loud in the biggest of ways. They had seen and heard someone with a gift of purpose and direction. And so they went, despite the stone that they knew was going to block their way.

And so, they arrived, already at the edge of what they thought they could handle, already a bit unhinged. And the women saw that that stone had somehow been rolled away. Many might have fled screaming. But Luke says these women didn't even flinch. They looked in. I think they kept on going because in their short time of knowing Jesus they had seen him surprise them over and over again, with impossible possibilities. With healings that made the body whole, with teachings that touched the soul, with food that fed thousands and thousands more. And so I think they were bold enough to look inside.

And then, if you remember the Easter story, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes were there. And the Bible says that was enough to terrify the women, and who can blame them? And so they bowed their heads, they turned low. But they did not run or flee. They did not leave because they had seen Jesus make the lame walk. They had seen Jesus make the blind see. And so they listened to what those angels said, because they had learned to listen.

Luke tells us that those women, in the place of impossible possibility, remembered. They remembered the words Jesus had said. But more important than that, I think they remembered how Jesus had lived, so full and so full of life. I think they remembered all the surprises every time Jesus sat to eat with someone the world said he shouldn't, every time Jesus broke down barriers that the world said he couldn't, and so why not now.

And so, they ran. They ran back to find the disciples. You know, the guys. Who by the way were still locked in and hiding. Afraid to be seen, and who could blame them? And they told them a story. They babbled out this story. They reminded the disciples of all Jesus had said. They kept on talking about these angels and the stone and the linens, and the impossible possibility. And the disciples thought it was crazy talk. For it didn't fit anything they expected.

But did you hear in the story? There was one among them. Do you remember who it was? Peter. The one who had denied even knowing Jesus a few days ago. I think Peter suddenly remembered just who Jesus was. I think Peter said this would sound crazy if it wasn't that I know Jesus to the core of my being. And so Peter gets up and he runs. He runs for the whole world to see. He runs until his lungs hurt. He runs until his feet hurt. He runs until he reaches the tomb. And when he sees those clothes there, do you remember what the Gospel says? What was he? He was amazed! Do you know why? Having spent enough time with Jesus, having watched Jesus walk on water,

having watched Jesus glow like the sun on the top of the mountain, watching Jesus bring the dead to life, and feed thousands with a few loaves and fishes, Peter knew of course, *of course* he is alive. And Luke tells us that Peter left that place happy and full of amazement, because he knew that once again the world had changed.

Not challenge-free, not paradise, not suddenly everything solved. For remember, they had just seen violence enacted on the one they loved. But instead they all knew that in the midst of everything life can throw at us, life is still there. Hope still blossoms. Good news still abounds. It is why we still do thousands of years later this crazy counter-cultural thing called church. Not just on this day, but did you know that we actually show up here every week?

I went once to pick up our CSA allotment of vegetables when we first moved here, all pleased with this great church and my calling as pastor. And we were out picking sugar snap peas, when a woman walked up next to me and said, oh, what do you do? So I told her I'm a pastor. And she said to me, really? People still come to church? It was a bit of a buzz kill. But I assured her we do.

And here's why. We come week after week after week to share the fullness of our lives, just like Joanna and Mary and the other Mary. Just like Peter and the disciples. We come back over and over again to remember the story of Jesus. We come back over and over again amidst our broken and breaking lives to remember that it's not all up to us. Instead, it is up to the God of life. And you see, those stories over and over again, we don't just learn them, we're not just able to answer when I ask. They become embedded in our lives. They become a whole new way of seeing the world. They get us to start looking for goodness in the world rather than paying attention to the doom and gloom headlines that the world wants us to see. They get us to see small kids like we have in this room, and imagine the hope and possibility of the future, not the dread of what is.

These stories, you see, put our lives in the story of a bigger context. It allows us to do what's called hope. And in the Christian sense of the word hope, that is not some crazy pipe dream. It is instead a sure conviction based on what we know and how we've lived. Those women and Peter and the disciples hoped, not because they fancied. They hoped because they witnessed. They hoped because they lived. They hoped because they saw a better way, and they wanted to keep on seeing it. They wanted to see this new thing come to life.

I am so glad that you are here today to be part of this beauty, this life, to hear a story that so much of the world thinks is idle talk, like those disciples did for a moment, as something to discard at the end of the day like today's Sunday Times, until next year comes around. But I hope you leave here, just like Mary and Joanna and the other Mary and Peter, just like they left Jesus so many times in life, surprised by goodness, intrigued by possibility, enlivened by some beauty you hadn't noticed before, compelled by the kind of truth we can only inhabit when we open ourselves up to what is beyond any of us. For this thing of faith is one continually unfolding flower of surprise, one that leads us not to ignore the world, but to still see goodness in every breath and then to become part of it.

Here's what I hope. That later today, when somebody calls you on the phone and asks about your Easter and how it all went, I hope that you actually struggle for the words for just a while. I hope

that you find yourselves so astounded and speechless by what God is doing, that no simple even if beautiful statement will suffice for what you have experienced. And then I hope, I really do, that like Mary and Joanna and the other Mary and Peter, that you just keep coming back to see what new surprises God has in store for you, whether by reading your Bible or coming back here – we'll be here next week – until there is no goodness you can't imagine springing forth. Until you can't imagine anything that life can't break forth from. Until you see goodness and possibility, not just in our amazing kids, but in every human being that crosses your path. For each of you is God's beloved. Keep coming back until life, direction, purpose, a spring in our step and a spark in our collective heart is not some pipe dream, but the truth of today, just like the truth of Easter.

Friends, come and see. Come and see. Amen.