

March 23, 2008

Easter

Title: Resurrection Everyday!

Scripture: God's unending love: Jeremiah 31:1-6  
The Resurrection: Matthew 28:1-10

Prayer: Dear Holy One, we are here today because we have hope that the resurrection will enter into our lives and transform us. We have come to love one another. Amen.

Jesus the teacher, preacher, healer. We remember him telling stories about finding the lost, welcoming home the delinquent youth, loving your enemies, forgiving the adulterer, caring for the sick. This is the Jesus who welcomes the children, who eats dinner with alcoholics, who hosts a picnic with five loaves of bread and three fish for 5,000 people - and all were satisfied. This is the Jesus who showed us that there's enough food to go around for everyone, there's enough of God's love to fill every aching heart, there's enough compassion in the life-blood of our souls to love our neighbors even when we don't know them or don't like them.

There's enough love in the world to go around and reach everyone. That's the message he brings to the world. Some days I have my doubts. When I hear about moms yelling at dads and dads yelling at their children. When I learn about someone being excluded because of race, religion, or sexual identity. When people come to the church looking for fuel assistance. Yet, every week fifty food bags are filled so our neighbors can have some food.

When I had my first child, Rebecca, I was overwhelmed with the love I had for her. Then I had my second child, Albie. How could I possibly love him when all my love was going to her? Yet, there was enough to go around. More than enough - the love just grew and multiplied. God's love is like that - the more you use it the more there is. It's not like a pitcher of milk, when it is divided out and all gone, there is none left. Instead, God's love is like a mustard seed - it keeps growing bigger and stronger. God's love is like the yeast in the bread - it needs to be used so it can produce more.

Jesus taught us all these things and much more. As we live our lives the truth of his sayings won't leave us alone. Gradually our hearts are reshaped and we are given hope even when bad things happen to us. Inner peace and emotional rest come as we are welcomed into the circle of friendship. This is the Jesus we have been following since Christmas time, calling him the Messiah.

And then the authorities came, breaking down the door as Jesus and his friends were having dinner. He is arrested, taken away to jail like any criminal. But he hasn't stolen anything. He hasn't hit anyone or been in a fight. He hasn't manipulated his father's carpentry business to take big profits. He hasn't gotten a speeding ticket for riding a donkey too fast. All he has done is tell stories, interpret holy scriptures, pray with people, and heal the sick.

They took him to trial before the government official, Pontius Pilate. In the court room Jesus doesn't say much as they make their case against him: They call you the king of all the Jewish people who live under my control. They say, Jesus is Lord. But we say, Caesar is Lord. Now, we can't have two high and holy Lords, can we? We've got the legal power, money power and police power. As for you, you have no money, no good clothes. You have no connections with important people like lawyers, temple priests, wealthy farmers or foreign dignitaries. All you have is a bunch of followers who like to sing and dance in the streets. For threatening the empire and disturbing the peace, for you, death by crucifixion.

It happened on Friday. But, today is Sunday. That was three long days ago. In our own lives we know a lot can happen in three days - have a baby, receive a college acceptance letter, be sent overseas by the army, get a report from the doctor, start a new job. But these three days - from death on the cross to

resurrection. Awe and wonder fill our hearts. We can hardly talk, our throats are tight, the words can't get out. "What's happening?" we want to know. "What is the meaning of all of this?"

We feel his presence when we are lost. He touches our wounds when we are hurt. He comforts us when we are sick. He stands with us when we work for peace. We know him at the communion table in the breaking of the bread and sharing the cup of blessing. A friend told me recently that at a Maundy Thursday service some ten years ago she "finally got" communion. This time when tasting the bread and reaching for the cup, on a very personal level, she understood the message of communion - that Christ is there for me and with me, that I have nothing to fear, not even death.

In the same mysterious way the meaning of the resurrection story comes to us: The love of God is more powerful than death. Jesus lives we sing and shout. Even after death, Jesus lives. Look, the tomb is empty. Jesus is not among the dead, but among the living. We are saved from emptiness, from suffering, from death. Alleluia, Christ is risen.

But that's not all - just like love, the giving of resurrection continues to multiply. There is so much more to the promise of this new, vibrant kingdom of God. On that Easter resurrection day the love of God overcomes the power of the Roman empire. Political tyranny can no longer rule over the lives of the poor, the forgotten, the unemployed, the foreigner, the women, the children. Government cruelty cannot destroy the soul. All the money in the world, all the social status, glitter and glamour one might have cannot give privilege in the eyes of God.

They thought they could eliminate this trouble maker and erase the message he brings to you and me and all those others, the message of being saved from hurt and despair. And for us, his friends and followers, we thought he was gone forever. We lost all hope.

Then Jesus the risen Christ appears in our hearts and in our minds. And the trumpets blow: Despair dies with Christ; hope rises with him. Transformation takes place. We grow and change, let go, move on, turn around, reach out, and we love because he lives within each one of us. Jesus lives in us: in our love, in our compassion, in our forgiveness. And we, we become the answer to the question: Where is God?

Through each one of us in the name of Christ, Resurrection takes place every day. Amen.