

Easter 2010 C

Texts: Acts 10:34-43

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-29

1 Corinthians 15: 19-29

Luke 24:1-10

“ Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”

Luke 24: 5

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.”

Alleluia! The Lord is Risen!

Does it get any better than this? Is there anything more glorious than celebrating the victory of our Lord over death? I don't think so.

When I got to church early this morning the birds were singing like crazy. On and on and on they went. Do you think they were singing songs of praise? Do you think they know what we proclaim? I think they do.

We are told many times in the Bible that it isn't just us humans who sing praises to God, we are told that all creation sings at God's glory. Today, when you hear a bird singing, listen carefully because it just may be saying, “Alleluia! The Lord is Risen!”

A friend recently told me the story about her Sunday School class. They had been talking about Jesus and heaven and what God has done in Christ to ensure our eternal presence with him.

She wanted to make sure they understood the concept of heaven so she asked them, “If I sold my house and my car and had a big garage sale and gave all the money to the church, would that get me into heaven?”

“NO!” the children shouted. “If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the lawn and worked in the food pantry one day a week, would that get me into heaven?” “NO!” came the reply.

My friend was feeling pretty good about her lessons and thought to herself, “leave it to the little ones to really understand God and heaven.

We adults just don't get it sometimes, but the children...they just know."

"So," she continued, "If I was very nice to all the animals, loved my family and did the very best I could not to do something wrong, would that get me into heaven?"

Again, the children cried out, "NO!"

My friend was about to burst her buttons with pride. "So, how do I get into heaven?" she asked. A little 5 year old boy named Tommy shouted out, "YOU GOTTA BE DEAD!!!"¹

"You gotta be dead!" Here is the mystery and paradox of the Christian faith. The message of Easter is that Christ broke the bonds of death. The message of Easter is that no matter what we do, no matter what we don't do, we cannot make God love us any less and we cannot make God love us any more than God already does.

Because God wants us close to him, because God wants eternity with us, God becomes human and breaks the hold, the very last hold the world has on us and that is death.

This is not only what is preached in every Christian church throughout the world, it is what was and is proclaimed by every Christian that has ever lived.

We do not proclaim some interesting theological idea or proposition. We proclaim God in flesh and blood. We do not proclaim some metaphysical or paranormal experience; we proclaim the Son of God crucified, dead, buried and now risen and living.

We do not proclaim death as final, we proclaim death as defeated! This came home to me several years ago in one of the most poignant and amazing acts of faith I have ever witnessed.

I had a friend by the name of Joan, who was probably the bravest woman I have ever met. Joan was a nurse at Children's Hospital. She

¹ Adapted from Homiletics March/April 2010 vol. 22 #2 p.50

grew up in a family where several members of the family suffered from cystic fibrosis. When she was in her teens her sister died from the disease. Joan was diagnosed with it in her 20's. She had been on swim teams from the time she was little and throughout college. Her doctors believe that all the swimming in heated and chlorinated pools helped to stem off the disease for many years. By the time she was in her late 20's or early 30's however her lungs were so scarred she had to have a double lung transplant.

After the extensive rehabilitation she managed to go back to work as a pediatric nurse. She did so well that she even swam in the transplant Olympics.

Joan married and dreamed of having children. The problem was that given all the drugs she had to take pregnancy was not an option for her. She and her husband, Jeff, decided to adopt a child from Russia. As you know, this can take many years.

About eight years after her first transplant she required another lung transplant as well as a kidney transplant. She came back from those pretty well. In June of the same year they got the call they had been waiting for; they were to fly to St. Petersburg and then take a very long train ride to get to the orphanage where their son was.

The trip to Russia was long and grueling. When Joan, her husband and son returned from Russia Joan became very ill. She had picked up some kind of infection during the trip that with her compromised immune system she just couldn't fight off. She was admitted to Barnes Hospital and died there less than two months after returning from Russia.

The day of her funeral dawned bright and cool. It was a really beautiful day. The church was packed with family, friends, co-workers, and the parents of children who had been her patients at Children's hospital. An announcement was made at the end of the service that the family wanted all those at the church to wait there. The family was going to the cemetery for the internment but would be returning.

The reason the family asked all of us to stay was because upon their return to the church, Jeff and Joan's son, Nate, was to be baptized. To

be present at that baptism, that baptism that immediately followed the grief and mourning of that packed church was an experience that I will never forget.

There was joy in that sanctuary. There was laughter and tears and celebration. It was the most powerful experience of resurrection that I have ever witnessed. Everything came full circle. It was absolutely astonishing.

The first line of the gospel hymn we just sang proclaims, “We know that Christ is raised and dies no more. Embraced by death he broke its fearful hold; and our despair he turned to blazing joy. Alleluia!”²

That sums up what all of us in the church that day experienced perfectly. That is exactly what it was like.

We do not proclaim death as final; we proclaim death as defeated.

Just as we do not proclaim that death is final we also do not proclaim Christ’s resurrection as final. It is only the beginning-the beginning of a whole new creation, a new world, a new reality. What we have is new and unending life in Jesus Christ.

By the breaking of death’s bonds we are called from our old belief that death is final to a new belief that life is eternal.

To quote verse two of our gospel hymn, “We share by water in his saving death. Reborn we share with him an Easter life as living members of a living Christ. Alleluia!”³

Does it get any better than this? Is there anything more glorious than celebrating our Lord’s victory over death? I don’t think so.

The Lord is risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Amen.

² The Hymnal 1982, #296

³ ibid

