

“Easter Resurrection”

John 20:1-12

April 4, 2010, Easter Sunday

Rev. Jeff Allen

It's Easter morning, so you'll understand if I'm a little enthusiastic this morning. Over the past week, we have journeyed through the events of Holy Week. We have shouted Hosanna and waved palm branches to welcome the promised Messiah. We have eaten together with Jesus one last time before he suffers. We have heard him predict his betrayal and wondered if we might be the one to betray him. We have had our hands washed so they are clean and prepared for a life of service. We have watched as Jesus was unjustly convicted, beaten, humiliated and crucified. We have wept with Mary as Jesus breathed his last and was laid in the tomb.

And now it's Easter morning! Let the trumpet sound! Let the choirs sing! Let the bells ring out! Sound the drum! Shout for joy! Alleluia! Easter morning has come! So you'll understand if I'm a little enthusiastic this morning.

You see, the pain of Good Friday has been transformed into the celebration of resurrection on Easter morning. And that's what Easter's all about, isn't it? Transformation, resurrection and celebration. On Easter, we celebrate the concept of resurrection and all that it means to us. We celebrate that God doesn't let the pain of Good Friday have the last word. We celebrate that God is able to transform the pain of that event into cause for celebration. We celebrate that sin and death no longer have an unbreakable hold upon us. We celebrate that God makes resurrection possible, not just for Jesus 2000 years ago, but that resurrection is possible for us today. We celebrate that God can still transform our pain into celebration and bring about resurrection in our lives. And so you'll understand if I'm a little enthusiastic this morning.

Just imagine what would have happened if the events of Easter morning had not taken place. Imagine what life would be like if Good Friday was the end of the story of Jesus. What would our faith be like without resurrection? Would Jesus' teaching and public ministry have been enough? Would anyone have really believed in Jesus if he ended up dying just like so many other previous prophets and teachers? What difference does the resurrection make?

It makes all the difference! Without the resurrection, we could not proclaim, “Where, o death is thy sting?” Without the resurrection, the principalities and powers of this world would have had the last say instead of God. Without the resurrection, where would we find hope in our times of darkness and despair? Without the resurrection, how would we understand God's ability to claim victory over sin and death? Oh yes, resurrection makes all the difference.

A blog I read this week asked some folks to answer the question of why they need the resurrection. I'd like to read to you the response of Kara Root, the pastor of Lake Nokomis Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis, MN:

I need the Resurrection
because my sister is sick
and can't afford insurance,
because I've told a weeping Haitian mom,
"No, I can't take your son home with me."
because I've been rushed off a Jerusalem street
so a robot could blow up a bag that could've blown up us.
because I've exploded
in rage
and watched their tiny faces cloud with hurt.
because evil is pervasive
and I participate.
I need the Resurrection
because it promises
that in the end
all wrongs are made right.
Death loses.
Hope triumphs.
And Life and Love
Prevail.¹

The resurrection tells us to stand firm in hope. It says that Jesus is alive and in the world today. It says that death is not the end, that there is something more. The resurrection also says that, in Christ, your sins are remembered no more. It reminds us of God's promise that "as far as the east is from the west, so far are your transgressions removed from you." The past is gone, the future is open, and ripe with possibilities.

Now for some people, God's promise of resurrection is thought to be something that can only be hoped for in some far off future, but I'd like to say that that is not the case. Jesus came to proclaim that the Kingdom of God is coming, and he said it's already here. The kingdom of God, that ideal of peace and love, forgiveness and grace, it's not something that is available to us only in some distant afterlife, it is available to us now. Jesus came to tell us about it, to show us how it's done, and to call us to participate with him in co-creating the Kingdom of God here on earth. Jesus' consistent message was that we are called to be kingdom-people living kingdom-lives. The power of Easter morning is the realization that through Jesus' resurrection, the kingdom of this world, the kingdom of sin and death has been overcome by the Kingdom of God. So, as kingdom-people living kingdom-lives we are also to be resurrection-people living resurrection-lives, bringing about ministries of resurrection in the world. That is the only way that the fullness of the Kingdom of God will be realized. We have a part to play. We are called to be co-creators of the Kingdom of God.

¹ Kara Wood, "Why I Need the Resurrection." <http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Why-I-Need-the-Resurrection.html>, accessed 4/3/10.

Do you ever wake up in the morning with something running through your head? It happens to me all the time. Mostly it's a song that I heard the day before. When I woke up yesterday morning, there was this sermon that I once heard, continually running through my mind. It was based on a sermon given by Tony Campolo. Tony has been going to the same church all his life. Over the years it has become a primarily black congregation. One Sunday, for an hour and a half, the minister preached essentially the same sentence over and over again. It's Friday, but Sunday's a comin'. It's Friday, but Sunday's a comin'. He began to slowly embellish the sentence to explain what he meant.

When Jesus was nailed to the cross and died, it was Friday. But what they didn't know was that Sunday was coming.

When darkness covered the land and it seemed all hope was lost, it was Friday. But Sunday was coming.

When Mary watched her son die a horrible and humiliating death, it was Friday. But Sunday was coming.

In our day, when hurricanes blow or floods roll in, destroying everything in their path, it's Friday. But Sunday's coming.

When we can't find a job or when our work is unfulfilling, it's Friday. But Sunday's coming.

When we stand vigil at the side of someone we love as they lay dying, it's Friday. But Sunday's coming.

When you or someone you love fights a seemingly endless battle with addiction, it's Friday. But Sunday's coming.

When we face a medical diagnosis that strikes fear into our heart, it's Friday. But Sunday's coming.

When a loved one breaks our heart, it's Friday. But Sunday's coming.

When we realize the abundance of evil, injustice, oppression, poverty and war in the world, and it all seems too hopeless to overcome, it's Friday. But Sunday's coming.

When the world tells you you're no good, you're worthless, you're ugly, you have nothing to contribute, it's Friday. But Sunday's coming.

When pain and grief and despair overwhelm, it's Friday. But Sunday's coming.

My friends, the good news of Easter is that Sunday has come! Jesus Christ is risen! Death has been defeated, sin has been forgotten, the tomb is empty, Christ is alive in the world. Sunday has come! And so you'll understand if I'm a little bit enthusiastic this morning.

We no longer need to live in the darkness of Friday. The pain and guilt and suffering of Friday do not have the last word. God through Jesus Christ has the last word, and that word is a word of hope, it is a word of peace, it is a word of love. That word is resurrection.

Today, let us claim the resurrection God makes available to us. Let us claim that resurrection, and then go into the world, living resurrection-lives and living as agents of resurrection for others. This is our call to discipleship on this Easter Sunday, and every day. When the world proclaims, "It's Friday," let us, together, raise our voices to proclaim that Sunday's coming, and that it is now here. Amen? Amen.