

Sermons at Union Congregational Church

Preached by The Reverend Gail L. Miller, Pastor

April 5, 2015

Easter Sunday

Psalm 30

Mark 16:1-8

Resurrection Matters

*There seemed to be a curious noise all around them... A strange, sweet, rustling, chattering noise... It was the noise of running water. All around them, though out of sight, there were streams chattering, murmuring, splashing... And his heart gave a great leap (though he hardly knew why) when he realized that the frost was over. And much nearer there was a drip-drip-drip from the branches of all the trees. And then, as he looked at one tree he saw a great load of snow slide off it and for the first time since he had entered Narnia he saw the dark green of a fir tree... (~C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*)*

Remember Narnia? Under the spell of the White Witch and where it is always winter, but never Christmas?

And with the snow piles still surrounding - receding yes - but still present - how we long for the warmth of spring and the new shoots that declare "even 108 inches of snow cannot keep us away!" It has been a Narnia-like winter, except that not only do we get Christmas, but we get Easter as well.

I always like it when Easter comes early enough that there is still snow on the ground, so that our proclamation He is Risen cannot be confused with the beauty of gardens coming to life and the greening of our lawns.

Because we need the Resurrection the most, when winter is prolonged and the cold has gone deep within us. Right?

Doesn't the food taste better when we're hungry?

Doesn't arriving at your destination safely feel better, when you almost had an accident?

Doesn't being pain-free feel better, when we have actually been in pain?

The Good News of the Resurrection is like that.

It is Good News because first there was Bad News.

The light shines brighter when the room is darker.

And I can't imagine the darkness and the winter that was in the hearts of those who had been with Jesus, and had loved Jesus, and had hoped he was the one to change everything for them - I can't imagine what it was like for them, as they faced a vast empty future that was clearly not turning out the way they had envisioned it. Always winter... Narnia....

And while we are ensconced in flowers, and balloons, and bright colors, and joyful music - that's because we know how it all turned out. We declare with confidence: Christ is Risen - He is risen indeed! But the women in our Gospel lesson who found the empty tomb were not so sure.

Remember, they didn't go to the tomb to see if he was still there; they went to finish burying him. Because, they didn't have time the night before to finish what we could call embalming.

Discovering Jesus' empty tomb and the message that he is alive didn't immediately evoke joy, wonder, relief, praise, confidence, excitement, or a desire to tell others. Instead, the women were terrified, speechless and ran away.

"Christ is risen," the angelic figure in the tomb says to the devoted women who came to anoint Jesus' corpse.

"Let's get the heck out of here!" was their response!

Under the heavy weight of grief, they had no ability to receive this news as GOOD news! But still it is proclaimed. Even before we have the heart to receive it.

God is like that - coming to us - often before we're ready for Him.

Pastor Kenneth Samuel writes about this in a meditation on Psalm 30:

I had always understood "morning" to be the daybreak that God sends after the nighttime of our misery and suffering. I believed that joy would surely come when daylight appeared, and we could finally see our way out of the trepidations and tribulations of the night.

Then, late one night, I received a call, and when I answered the phone, the caller said to me, "Good morning." I looked over at the clock and it was 12:07 a.m. It suddenly dawned on me that morning comes to most of us not at daybreak, but at night.

And since joy comes in the morning, joy must come when we realize that our new day dawns at night. Joy comes when we understand and believe that dark times and dark situations cannot prevent the fulfillment of God's promise and progress in our lives. Joy comes when we celebrate the fact that even in darkness, God is still moving us toward better days.

Good News! Morning arrives while it is still dark.
The thaw begins when it's still winter and cold.
The future that is promised, is already here! Good News!

I invite you to believe this! And not just believe it, but to live it! Because the resurrection matters - not only for our future life with God - but as importantly for our present tense lives.

And not in some generic, theological, other-worldly way – but actually and practically.

Because much of life is lived in winter - sometimes a seemingly never-ending winter!

Much of life is lived in the dark of night - the kind of dark night we wish we could sleep right through!

When we're heading out (like the women) to the burial of a friend,
or when the prognosis is not good,
or when the one you love leaves,
or when the pain just won't go away...

This is when we need a resurrection - and not just any resurrection –
but a personal and present tense resurrection.

Do you need the resurrection to be more than something that happened to Jesus 2,000 years ago?
Do you need to be reminded that there is more to life than the daily grind, or the monthly grind, or the yearly grind?
Do you need joy to find you in the dark of night, rather than waiting 'til the sun comes up?
Are you still waiting for your heart to thaw?

Well, I have only one thing to offer you....And it's the same thing we offer every year on this day - and not just today but every week - and that is the love of Christ.

The reason we go nuts with the flowers and the music today, is because the empty cross - the resurrected Jesus = LOVE. Because if Jesus weren't raised from the dead, how would we know that what God says is true?

That joy comes in the morning, that He can bring good out of evil, love out of hate, and hope out of despair.

The love of Jesus Christ is a love that will go to the ultimate end – and beyond!
He gave his life 2,000 years ago so that we can have life and hope and love NOW.

The resurrection matters, not because it is a nice ending to the story of Jesus; but because it is the beginning of our story, a story in which life triumphs over death, as only Jesus can show us.

C. S. Lewis' story of Narnia isn't just a story – it's true. I've seen it: love – fierce and sacrificial love take hold of a person – a people – and change everything.

And this love is as real as the bread and cup we will share here in a few minutes. As you receive this meal, receive the love of Christ present – really present here.

Soon there were more wonderful things happening. Coming suddenly round a corner into a glade of silver birch trees Edmund saw the ground covered in all directions with little yellow flowers—celandines. The noise of the water grew louder. Presently they actually crossed a stream. Beyond it they found snowdrops growing...

"This is no thaw," said the dwarf, suddenly stopping. "This is Spring. What are we to do? Your winter has been destroyed, I tell you! This is Aslan's doing." (C. S. Lewis)

The winter is over.
The empty cross = love.
This is promised and this is true.
Amen.