

Recognizing Resurrection

John 20:1-18

Sunday, April 12, 2020, Easter

Beargrass Christian Church

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. I hope you hanging in there during the pandemic.
- B. The situation has challenged us to make some changes.
- C. An English teacher decided to give something up for Lent.
 - a. She posted: "I'm giving up drinking for a month."
 - b. After weeks of being quarantined she put up a new post.
 - c. "Sorry, bad punctuation. I'm giving up. Drinking for a month."
- D. I felt sorry for the elderly man who said, "This is driving me crazy."
 - 1. "I went to the bathroom at Kroger's, washed my hands, opened the door with my elbow, and raised the toilet seat with my foot."
 - 2. "I turned on the water with a paper towel and used a different paper towel to open the door to leave."
 - 3. "When I walked out I realized that I forgot to pull up my pants."
- E. A couple of pent-up parents posted this message.
 - 1. "If you see our kids locked outside today, mind your business."
 - 2. "We are having a fire drill. #HomeSchool."
- F. Someone else shared this message: "I'm having an Easter quarantine party on Sunday—none of you are invited."
- G. And we're having Easter services today—but you weren't invited.
 - 1. Who could have guessed that on the day when our sanctuaries are usually the fullest—that they would be empty?
 - 2. But I am very grateful that you have joined us virtually as we celebrate Easter 2020 alone together!

II. OUR EASTER THEME IS RECOGNIZING RESURRECTION.

- A. The series is part of a year-long emphasis called "2020 Vision."
 - 1. When we hear the number "2020," we think of eyesight.
 - 2. So it seems fitting to embrace it thematically and theologically.
- B. As the rest of the year unfolds we will focus on other variations of the theme: "Pentecost Perspectives" and "Visions of Advent."
 - 1. During the Easter season, from today through the end of May, we will continue to examine texts from the Gospel of John.
 - 2. We will be challenged to look for signs of resurrection.
 - 3. There has been so much despair and death during the pandemic.
 - 4. I believe that it is vitally important for all of us as people of faith to identify signs of life and new birth—and share them!

III. WE JUST HEARD JOHN'S VIEW OF THE EASTER STORY.

- A. We have also recalled Mary's encounter with Jesus in the garden.
 - 1. We are familiar with the phrase, "I'll believe it when I see it."

2. Her experience is a helpful and powerful reminder that sometimes even when we see it, we don't always believe it.
- B. The folks who went to the tomb weren't ready for what they found.
1. Mary Magdalene discovers the tomb empty, but the first words out of her mouth aren't "He is risen!"
 2. She thinks someone has taken the body—she tells the disciples.
 3. Peter and his pal run to the tomb and find it empty.
 4. But the first words out of their mouths aren't "He is risen!"
 5. They just go back into hiding and tell their friends.
 6. The concept of a temporary tomb seems bizarre.
- C. And yet, stories in the news are also strange and troubling.
1. New York City is looking into ways to temporarily bury the dead because of the mounting coronavirus death toll.
 2. They are exploring using Hart Island for temporary burials.
 3. And as Israel fights to stop the spread of the virus in the Holy Land, they are shutting down many major historic sites.
 4. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, believed by some to be the site of Jesus' tomb in Jerusalem's Old City, closed its doors.
 5. This is the first time it has happened since the Black Plague!
 6. I thought, "Good luck with that—you may keep people out—but you couldn't keep Jesus in the first time—and you still can't."
- D. Anyway, later in the story, Jesus asks Mary, "Why are you weeping?"
1. With tear-blurred vision, she mistakes him for the gardener.
 2. How could she have forgotten—how could they have forgotten?
 3. What about all the healings and miracles and reminders and hints from Jesus that God is in the business of life, not death?
 4. What about Lazarus—there has been a series of little Easters!?
- E. It is difficult to remember the business that God is in—especially during a global pandemic—and everything else that is going on.
1. The numbers of the ill and those who have died are staggering.
 2. Good Friday really felt like Good Friday this year.
 3. We get caught up in death and we can't recognize resurrection.
- F. I talked with one of our members, Clemma, last week...99 years young...and her son is in the hospital right now on a ventilator.
1. She has seen so much happen during her lifetime.
 2. She said, "My grandfather told me how he survived the Spanish Flu.
 3. "But I didn't know how bad it could have been until now."
 4. There were 14,000 deaths in Kentucky alone.
 5. Officials dismissed it—until it killed 50 million people on the planet, 675,000 Americans—more than ten times as many as World War I.
 6. More died in a year than in the four years of the Black Death.
- G. And after we get through this, we will all know someone.

1. Behind every number is a name, a face, a story, a family—the degrees of separation are getting smaller and smaller.
2. Sharon Baker, 56, died in a hospital with a nurse by her side.
3. Her sister said: “As hard as it is to lose a sister, it was 1000 times harder because we couldn’t be there with her.”
4. “Can you imagine saying goodbye to a loved one on Zoom?”
5. Sharon was one of three sisters and three brothers who grew up in a close family in Louisville’s Portland neighborhood.
6. She was a beloved sister, mother, grandmother, cousin and aunt.
7. She ended every phone conversation and every get-together with her family with the words: “I love you to the moon and back.”

H. These stories are heartbreaking and painful and overwhelming.

IV. BUT THEY AREN'T THE END OF GOD'S STORY.

- A. A family was watching a movie about the life of Jesus.
 1. The nine-year-old daughter was deeply moved by the accounts and images of Jesus’ crucifixion and death.
 2. Tears ran down her cheeks as he was placed in the tomb.
 3. Then suddenly a big smile broke on her face.
 4. She bounced up on the edge of the couch and said with great anticipation, “Now comes the good part!”
- B. Isn’t it true that much of the saving history of God’s dealing with us is about the steady overcoming of death’s dominion over us?
- C. A pharaoh in Egypt made God’s people slaves and placed unbelievable and unbearable burdens on their backs.
 1. Moses was minding his business when a bush burst into flame.
 2. A voice shocked him: “I’ve heard the cries of my people—you’re going to free them—and go head-to-head with Pharaoh.
 3. Moses stammered—but that wasn’t the end of the story!
- D. Once free, God’s people did not stay free for long.
 1. From the north came the powerful Assyrians, burning, pillaging, and carting off the people from their homeland to exile.
 2. Death, deportation, defeat—but not the end of the story!
- E. In a little backwater town in Judea there were Roman troops stationed on every corner who were serving a ruthless dictator.
 1. But in the ghetto a young woman named Mary began to sing.
 2. “My soul magnifies the Lord, for God will scatter the proud and put down the mighty from their thrones.”
 3. It looked hopeless—but it wasn’t the end of the story!
- F. The events of last Friday took no one by surprise—you know how the establishment works—it was a good campaign while it lasted.
 1. Hope was nailed to a tree and buried in a tomb.
 2. But surprise—it wasn’t the end of the story!
- G. Who are we going to believe?

1. The world says, "Adjust, adapt—stuff happens."
2. A bomb goes off, a plane goes down, a tragedy takes place.
3. Go ahead, blame somebody, grow up, get tough, get over it.

H. But who are we going to believe?

1. When will we become accustomed to death's defeat?
2. When will we remember that the whole history of God's dealings with us is a story of new life and new beginnings?
3. When will we see that by the time we get to Easter, how could the tomb be anything but empty?
4. When will we realize that Easter is not something that happened long ago and far away—but a story that is not done with us yet?!

V. **WILL WE BE ABLE TO RECOGNIZE RESURRECTION?**

A. A chaplain at Baptist East shared a meaningful devotion last week.

1. West Belfast community worker Tommy Holland narrates a video showing the empty spaces and places throughout the city.
2. He says: "When you see the empty streets and parks, don't say to yourself, 'It looks like the end of the world.'"
 - a. "What you are seeing is love in action."
 - b. "What you are seeing is how much we care for each other."
 - c. "We care for our grandparents, our parents, our brothers and sisters, for all those with underlying health problems."
 - d. "We care for people we will never meet."
 - e. "People will lose jobs and businesses."
 - f. "And some people will lose their lives."
3. "This is all the more reason to just take a moment to look into all of that emptiness—and marvel at all of that love."
 - a. "Let it fill you and let it sustain you."
 - b. "It isn't the end of the world—but it is one of the most remarkable acts of global solidarity we may ever witness."

B. In a similar way, empty sanctuaries are symbols of love in action.

1. We show love for God, for our neighbors, and for each other.
2. We choose new ways of being church with and for each other.

C. In an even more powerful way...we remember the Easter story.

1. Usually when we open a gift of love, there is something inside.
2. But when Mary sees the tomb, there is nothing inside.
3. And that emptiness was...and is...God's greatest gift to us...
4. He is risen! He is risen indeed!
5. Thanks be to God!