

Easter Sunday

March 27, 2016

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Decorah, Iowa

Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of the risen Christ. Amen.

This morning we began saying, "Alleluia Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!" This greeting helps us celebrate the great good news that death does not have the final word, that goodness and love are stronger than evil and hatred. Yet, it's important to note that the first people to experience Jesus' resurrection did not respond, "He is risen indeed, Alleluia."

In all four Gospel accounts of the resurrection when Jesus' followers learn that the tomb is empty, that Jesus is not there, that he is risen, none of them say, "oh sure", "of course", "right, he said he was going to do that, Alleluia!" Instead, Jesus' followers are perplexed and afraid and do not believe this could have happened. In the Gospel of Luke, the women go to the tomb expecting to deal with death, expecting to face the dead body of their beloved teacher and do the tasks that death requires of them. Instead they find an empty tomb, but this doesn't immediately translate as good news - not by a long shot. They are perplexed. Then men in dazzling clothes show up and the women move from perplexed to terrified.

Only after the men remind them of what Jesus has said do they start to take this all in, start to realize that something amazing has happened. They begin to hope. So they go tell the disciples what they have heard. But the disciples respond, "you're crazy, what an idle tale." And actually the Greek word that Luke uses to describe their reaction means something more derogatory than idle tale - it's closer to nonsense, drivel, trash, garbage, bull, hogwash or worse. The disciples think the women are giving them a bunch of garbage. Here their friend, their teacher, their hope for the future has been brutally killed and now these women are saying he is risen from the dead? Their response conveys the kind of anger that springs from deep grief, "What are you talking about, what nonsense! Dead is dead; don't try to get my hopes up, don't try to tell me otherwise."

I imagine them feeling the way we do when it seems others are uncomfortable with our grief and suffering and are trying to rush us through it; when it seems people are trying to lessen, soothe or explain a loss that just cannot be soothed or explained away. Our wounds need to be honored. The loss of loved ones, dreams, health and relationships matter and need to be taken seriously. When the disciples hear about resurrection it seems to dismiss the reality of their loss, so the disciples dismiss the good news of the resurrection as an idle tale.

Peter alone goes to check things out and is amazed, but then he goes home. He doesn't go out to share the good news. The other ten disciples remain stuck in their anger, fear and disbelief until Jesus comes to them. It isn't until Jesus comes and shows them his hands and his feet, his wounds, that they all rejoice. By showing the disciples his wounds, Jesus honors the pain and suffering he, and all of them, have just experienced. As he does this, Jesus helps them to see that, yes, his wounds are real; yes, death is real but the God of life is stronger.

Yes, the worst has happened but the worst thing is not the last thing. *Then* they begin to believe the good news of the resurrection. We need what those disciples were given. We need the presence of Christ who has experienced great suffering and who comes to us to show us that, yes, our wounds are real. Yes, death is real but the God of life is stronger and we are given that gift.

The risen Christ comes to us in his body and blood, bearing the marks of his crucifixion, to feed us with life and love that death cannot contain. The risen Christ, the word of God, comes to us as his word is spoken, shared and sung in worship - in worship that names sorrow and proclaims that life and love is stronger. The risen Christ comes to us in his body the church, a body made of members who know deep suffering but continue to love and hope. The risen Christ comes to us when things seem hopeless and yet we find the strength to face the worst and keep going. That is the Spirit of the crucified and risen Christ at work and present with us. When this happens we discover that resurrection means the worst thing is never the last thing. In all things God works for good.

When the risen Christ comes to us in worship, in the witness of others, and in the midst of struggle, we see that resurrection does not deny or explain away pain and loss. Instead we see in his death and resurrection that Jesus tackled suffering head on - he entered it and worked life from the midst of it. Jesus' death shows that God is by our side in all that we face. God knows what it is to suffer.

And Jesus' resurrection shows that God is on the side of life, life abundantly, now and always. In Jesus' death and resurrection, suffering is honored, addressed and transformed. Life emerges from death, hope from sorrow, love from hatred. This is no idle tale that dismisses pain; this is the story of the new thing God does out of pain and suffering. In Jesus' death and resurrection our wounds now tell a resurrection tale. And we are sent out among the wounds of the world trusting that there we again will meet Jesus - there again we will find new life.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!

Thanks be to God.