



Sermon, April 1, 2018
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Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

Easter Sunday "Transcending the Powers"

Scripture: John 20:1-18

20:1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes. ¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹² and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

A Sunday School teacher asked her class on the Sunday before Easter if they knew what happened on Easter and why it was so important.

One little girl spoke up saying: "Easter is when the whole family gets together, and you eat turkey and sing about the pilgrims and all that."

"No, that's not it," said the teacher.

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"I know what Easter is," a second student responded. "Easter is when you get a tree and decorate it and give gifts to everybody and sing lots of songs."

"Nope, that's not it either," replied the teacher.

Finally, a third student spoke up, "Easter is when Jesus was killed, and put in a tomb and left for three days."

"Ah, thank goodness somebody knows" the teacher thought to herself.

But then the student went on: "Then everybody gathers at the tomb and waits to see if Jesus comes out, and if he sees his shadow he has to go back inside and we have six more weeks of winter."

I hope not, I've had enough of winter. I'm ready for Spring. How about you?

Here we are at the end of a very full Holy Week. As we have contemplated the last week and death of Jesus, we have also made our own journeys through death in various ways:

- Mass shootings in schools, outdoor concerts, and shopping centers have arrested our national attention.
- Political manipulation of news, public information, social media, and public opinion has become so vicious and partisan that it is difficult to separate out the truth from manufactured stories and outright lies.
- Natural disasters in Haiti, Puerto Rico, flooding in various regions
- People struggling with cancer and other life-threatening illnesses

Sometimes it makes you wonder about God, doesn't it, with all the suffering, pain and misery in life. But you know what, we are not puppets on God's strings. We are created with free will, we can make our own decisions, and we are free to order the world according to whatever we choose. The problem is in our choosing. The problem is in the world, the reality we have made ourselves.

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Holy Week is all about this world we've created with our own choosing. It is about a crowd that follows Jesus into town crying hosanna and waving palm branches, only to be yelling "Crucify him!" at the end of the week. This is the world we live in, that we accept as being "the way things are" simply because we know no other reality, no other possible way of living and being. We are so thoroughly immersed in our cultural way of thinking and living that we forget that everything about human societies are made by humans. With this realization comes a second realization: anything made by humans can be unmade by humans. Nothing is a "given," everything is a "made."

Holy week reminds us that we live in a world in need of redemption, in need of saving. We are reminded that this is a world of crucifiers. The crucifiers are those forces in our world that make you think that there is someone out there who is going to take away your job, or take away your freedom, or take away your land or your possessions or your family, or take away your way of life, or take away your religion and so you better get them first before they get you. The crucifiers rule by fear. The crucifiers rule the imagination by painting a picture of a world of scarcity wherein the goal of life is to be "on top" with others under your thumb, or to have more land or goods than your neighbor, or to have more freedom than someone else. The crucifiers come up with "Final Solutions" and Master Plans to rearrange the world in their own image.

Crucifiers even make a thing out of religion, such that only certain people can possess the correct thing, the real religion, and anyone else who doesn't have the correct religion, the "real thing," becomes dispensable, and their land and possessions are fair game. In the last century, this happened with the Jews in Germany, and is now happening this very year, this very week, this very Easter day in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Yemen, and many places in Africa. We saw the threat of it walking the streets of Charlottesville, carrying torches last year. Wherever we see any human being demeaned, abused, violated, enslaved, oppressed, or deprived of those things all humans need to thrive and grow into their fullness, we see the forces of a Good Friday world, a world of crucifiers at work

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It is into this world shaped by a Cruciform Reality that Jesus is born, sent by God. This world, shaped by a human-made Cruciform Reality, was created for good by God, but it needs to be redeemed from this reality of its own making. It needs to be shown a different reality, a reality conceived in the mind of the One who created the universe and all its beings.

But the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is God’s editorial statement regarding this world of crucifiers – this Good Friday world. While the Roman governor and the military and the religious leaders all congratulated themselves on the cleverness of their “Final Solution” to the Jesus problem, God showed the world what he thinks about “final solutions” of any kind and rolled the stone away. While the politicians, soldiers and religious functionaries were all protecting their turf and keeping the masses under their thumbs, Jesus turned all that upside down when he strode across the garden and said, “Mary.”

That’s right. When Jesus comes up to Mary and speaks her name, he is saying that what matters the most to God isn’t powerful armies, it isn’t wealth and power, it isn’t correct religious doctrine, it isn’t scrupulous ritual, what matters to God is what happens between us, between you and me, between us and our neighbors, between us and our children, between me and my spouse. What matters is when we speak one another’s names in love and compassion and caring. What matters to God is when our hearts are expanded and enlarged to take in a hurting and painful world, and to love it as deeply and fully as God loves it. That’s what matters to God.

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The word of resurrection is the word that speaks our name. It is the word that tells us we are all known deeply and intimately by a God whose love for us is so strong that he will wrestle and do battle with any force in the world that seeks to belittle us or abuse us or erase us from the face of the earth. God knows each person, everywhere upon this earth by name. Every abused child cowering in fear in their room, every person enslaved by drugs, every American soldier and every Iraqi refugee, every Jew, every Buddhist, every Muslim, every criminal and every prosecutor of criminals is known by name. Because God knows us each by name, we are not things to be acquired or mistreated, to be enslaved or ethnically cleansed. There are no Nazi final solutions with God, only final and ultimate commitments to the total well-being of every person on earth.

This morning, we spoke/will speak the names of those for whom we wish to pray. Each person is precious to God. Each name is spoken by God in love and each person is folded into God's heart. That is where we will meet our risen Lord, in those places where this world beats us down, hurts us, assaults us, belittles us, disregards us, betrays us. We meet the risen Lord there because that is precisely where he walked – 2000 years ago and still today.

The resurrection of Jesus proclaims once and for all that the forces of crucifixion, of death and destruction, of enslavement and domination, of abuse and dehumanization are overthrown. As people of God, as people of the Resurrected One, we, too, must live in the way of resurrection, to overthrow the power of the crucifiers, to break the grip the forces of death and destruction have upon the imaginations of the peoples of our world. Resurrection Life is all about love, trust, mutual care and concern, looking out for the welfare of one another, creating the sort of world where each person is free to develop those innate abilities, those potentials and possibilities that God has placed within

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each person, a place where the differences between people are celebrated rather than constricted or destroyed.

What our world needs now, here at the beginning of the Twenty-First century, is a Resurrection imagination. What the world needs is for those of us who claim the name of the Resurrected One to live and move in the world of the Resurrector, not the world of the crucifiers. What the world needs is for those of us who bear the name of the Resurrected One to choose life, and to resist death and all its forces.

And so, this morning, I want to extend to you the same offer Jesus extended to Mary that empty-tomb morning so long ago: go home to your families and friends, your neighbors and online friends, and tell them that Love wins. Tell them not to give in to despair or hatred. Tell them to embrace truth, to stand on the side of Life and Love. Tell them Jesus took on all the violence and death in our world so that we would stop killing one another and destroying life. Tell them the tomb is empty and Jesus is alive. And he’s speaking their names.