April 12th, 2019

Springfield Presbyterian Church

Easter Sunday

10:30am

Wilderness of Coronavirus – Virtual Church – Time Escapes Us

The First Easter

I. The First Easter

 As we celebrate Easter from our homes, we celebrate Easter in a new way. This Easter we celebrate is probably a closer reflection of what the first Easter looked like that faithful dawn. There was no pomp and circumstance like we heard on Palm Sunday, but rather, a woman weeping, so grief stricken that her Lord was moved somewhere else. There weren’t banners, or loud hosannas, or people shouting and proclaiming the good news.

 The first Easter looked like a flurry of two disciples and Mary, searching for Jesus. After the disciples had left, perhaps grieving so much that they gave up, Mary stood next to that empty tomb. The man she thought was the gardener, was Jesus himself. She did not recognize him at first, and that’s when we hear really the first exclamation – we hear that the story has taken a turn – when she shouts “Rabbouni!” She sees Jesus, she wants to hold on to him, she wants to hug him and never let him go. And yet he tells her – no, you can’t hold on to me, but go and tell the others what you’ve seen.

 And as Mary goes back to share the news with the disciples, I would imagine the celebration would start slowly, but surely. They believed through grace that what the prophets claimed had come to be, yet would they go out and shout it on the streets? Would they risk their lives, or quietly in hushed and excited tones, tell the believers one by one.

II. What we experience

 The Easter we usually experience at Springfield includes banners waving, the choir singing, smiling faces, and loud hallelujahs. And if you grieve not having that experience this year, know that you aren’t alone. I take great delight when our youth make a cake with questionable levels of sugar and dare Aaron to take a big bite. I love when we sing together, when the kids run out onto the yard for the egg hunt, and our choir sings a song of jubilee. I love being able to shake hands with folks and check in and hug them and remind them that they are God’s beloved.

 I think we all want to be back in this sanctuary, in this building. And the first solace I will provide is this: we will be back in this building, and when we are, you bet there will be a celebration. While we celebrate Easter this Sunday, every Sunday is an opportunity to celebrate the life, death, and resurrection – the very saving power – of Jesus Christ. The fellowship team is on it, there will be food, maybe a delayed egg hunt, but when you come back to this place, we are going to celebrate coming home. I promise you that. I can’t tell you when, but I want you to hold onto that hope.

 Another word of hope is one that comes from the letter to the Romans, a word we may be familiar with, Romans 8:38-39, which reads, “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor power, nor things present, nor things come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

 That reading firmly applies here today, we may be in separate places, but nothing, not a virus, not anything under the sun can take us away from Easter. As we come together and celebrate via Zoom, we see that though we are in challenging times and unchartered waters, the family of the faithful in Christ still continue to come together.

 It may feel like so much in the world is cancelled, so much has been taken from us. As I’ve said in the last few weeks, hearing it from another friend, “This is the Lentist Lent we’ve ever Lented.” The wilderness has been real, and it will continue to be real. But the hope of the resurrection will sustain us. The hope of this day will save us. The joy of God’s love in Jesus Christ will let the Spirit continue to move in and through us all our days.

 And perhaps, though we never wanted times like this, we look at Easter with a freshness. In years to come, we will remember these days, and when we are joined together again in this building, oh the alleluias we will hear! This place we are living in can be a place of learning: we learn to be better disciples of Christ by being compelled to try out new and creative ministries, by relearning how to connect through old ways and new. This Easter points us to hope, and in that hope, we will live as changed people. Changed for the better.

I would like to close this sermon with a poem, as we seek to experience Easter in a renewed way. May the words dwell in your heart and may we continue to grow on this journey, this journey where Easter has changed us. The poem I would like to share comes from Kristi Bothur, called “How the Virus Stole Easter”– listen carefully, and may you find the hope that she shares.

Twas late in ‘19 when the virus began

Bringing chaos and fear to all people, each land.

People were sick, hospitals full,

Doctors overwhelmed, no one in school.

As winter gave way to the promise of spring,

The virus raged on, touching peasant and king.

People hid in their homes from the enemy unseen.

They YouTubed and Zoomed, social-distanced, and cleaned.

April approached and churches were closed.

“There won’t be an Easter,” the world supposed.

“There won’t be church services, and egg hunts are out.

No reason for new dresses when we can’t go about.”

Holy Week started, as bleak as the rest.

The world was focused on masks and on tests.

“Easter can’t happen this year,” it proclaimed.

“Online and at home, it just won’t be the same.”

Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, the days came and went.

The virus pressed on; it just would not relent.

The world woke Sunday and nothing had changed.

The virus still menaced, the people, estranged.

“Sadness to the saints,” the world was grumbling.

“They’re finding out now that no Easter is coming.

“They’re just waking up! We know just what they’ll do!

Their mouths will hang open a minute or two,

And then all the saints will all cry a sad boo-hoo

“That noise,” said the world, “will be something to hear.”

So it paused and the world put a hand to its ear.

And it did hear a sound coming through all the skies.

It started down low, then it started to rise.

But the sound wasn’t depressed.

Why, this sound was triumphant!

It couldn’t be so!

But it grew with abundance!

The world stared around, popping its eyes.

Then it shook! What it saw was a shocking surprise!

Every saint in every nation, the tall and the small,

Was celebrating Jesus in spite of it all!

It hadn’t stopped Easter from coming! It came!

Somehow or other, it came just the same!

And the world with its life quite stuck in quarantine

Stood puzzling and puzzling.

“Just how can it be?”

“It came without bonnets, it came without bunnies,

It came without egg hunts, cantatas, or money.”

Then the world thought of something it hadn’t before.

“Maybe Easter,” it thought, “doesn’t come from a store.

Maybe Easter, perhaps, means a little bit more.”

And what happened then?

Well....the story’s not done.

What will YOU do?

Will you share with that one

Or two or more people needing hope in this night?

Will you share the source of your life in this fight?

The churches are empty - but so is the tomb,

And Jesus is victor over death, doom, and gloom.

So this year at Easter, let this be our prayer,

As the virus still rages all around, everywhere.

May the world see hope when it looks at God’s people.

May the world see the church is not a building or steeple.

May the world find Faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection,

May the world find Joy in a time of dejection.

May 2020 be known as the year of survival,

But not only that -

Let it start a revival.

Amen.