Springfield Presbyterian Church

April 4th, 2021

Easter Sunday

Arise and Blossom

1. The Road We Walk

When we began Lent together this year, I felt like a cruel

pastor. For the last year, we have been living in a Lenten contemplation where we have faced our own mortality head on and found discomfort in the unknown and lived day to day, if not hour by hour, or moment by moment. So, who am I, who am I to ask you to think about death further, who am I to ask you to be somber and sullen and grieve, when you have spent a year in the pandemic considering this grief deeply.

Yet, I say, and will continue to say – we cannot get to this morning, we cannot get to the moment of pure Easter joy until we go through the weeds and struggles that Lent brings us, year in and year out. Every year, we learn something new, something different about God and about ourselves as we have to be uncomfortable and ask the question that permeates these times, “Why did our Savior have to die? Why here, why now, why in this way, on a cross, gory and piercing? Why couldn’t our sin be forgiven in some other way?”

Admittedly, sometimes I find it strange to wear a cross as a necklace, because the cross was used as a form of torture and death, not only for our Savior, but for others at that time in history. Yet today, that history becomes transformed in a new way – the cross is no longer a sign of death and destruction, if anything, it is a sign that death is defeated. The cross is empty and so is the tomb, and now the old life, the old ways, step aside – a new way, a new life, a new understanding of Christ and how to follow Christ has come to light. Today, today we lived steeped in the good news!

1. Flowering Cross

This Lent, I met with our Mission and Outreach committee

and possibly in my own struggles of wading through Lent, I shared with them about this idea of flowering the cross – an idea that has been around since the 6th century. Yet, we have never flowered a cross at Springfield and growing up, I had never flowered a cross at my home church. After seeing photos of such beauty and this transformational cross, I said to the Mission and Outreach committee: “Here’s my vision. I have no idea how to do it.” So, I reached out to our community – I talked to Linda, and to Ron and to others and they made the vision a reality - and now before you, right here, we have this beautiful cross that we have transformed.

This cross, with flowers created by God’s Creation, plucked up by our human hands from our own gardens and flower beds, have created this beautiful and vibrant symbol of life. The cross, which laid bare and seemed to stand for death alone, has taken on a whole new meaning and a statement that we now claim as our good news: Arise from the ground, arise from despair, arise from the challenges of this year and this Lent and see this tangible sign of transformation and new life before you. Life as we know it, has changed, and now we have the opportunity to live in that renewal.

1. Scripture

I can imagine Mary’s fear as she probably held a bundle of flowers and greenery to adorn

her Savior’s tomb, but as she seeks to grieve – life is interrupted. Mary’s first reaction is a sensible one – she wants to know who stole Jesus, things were already bad enough, how could someone take Jesus from the tomb? She wanted to honor him in the struggles of her own grief, but her Savior is nowhere to be found.

The disciples play their own part in the story as well, finding their Savior’s tomb to be empty. But our story and its focal point lands on Mary, especially when she sees the gardener. She’s engulfed in her own grief, she can’t see clearly, her eyes are blurred by tears streaming down her face and she begs the gardener to show to her wear Jesus has been laid. Yet it isn’t the gardener, it is Jesus – and in his soft and gentle way, softly smiling and looking at Mary, his true identity is revealed. She yells, probably for the entire valley to hear, “Rabbouni!” or “Teacher!” and all the sudden, things are turned on their head – the Savior that suffered death, defied death itself, and now resurrected – everything has changed.

1. Resurrection

And it should change, it should change Mary and the disciples and the early Christians, but

the story should not be any less meaningful to those of us who gather today. Today, we as disciples of Christ, get to say, “New life has come, death has been defied – and now we’re going to live like we mean it. We are going to live with an emphasis on hope, even when that seems far off. We are going to choose to see the light when darkness seems to eclipse it. We are going to be alive in love, loving those who are easy to love and those who are difficult to love. We are going to follow Christ, not confined by our own minds – but we are going to dream big God sized dreams and with one another’s help – we will proclaim our Savior to the world.”

Today, today you get to arise – arise in hope, peace, love, and joy – the old life, this way we have been living, this past Lent and this past year will be one for the history books, and we are certainly not yet out of danger – but we have been given hope with vaccines. There is a light at the end of the tunnel where we can go back up those stairs and laugh and sing and cry and hug each other as the family of Christ and say, “We have shown that we can be the church outside these walls, how grateful we are to be able to be the church inside these walls as well.”

My friends, arise. Arise – well, if you are in your car…stay seated – but say the words that we have been waiting for: “Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ our Lord is Risen Today!” Let’s push beyond our boundaries, join me in saying those words out loud – because we need to hear them in our own voice as we declare the good news. Say it with me, my fellow Presbyterians, say it loudly, “Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ our Lord is Risen Today!”

Now go, go from this place and live like you mean the words you’ve just spoken. Arise and awaken! Your job as a disciple is far from over, perhaps the job is just beginning. Go and share the good news. Go and tell the world that life defies death and love will continue to be the driving force of all the good in this world. Arise and blossom into the disciple that Christ calls you to be – arise and be a vessel of God’s message of renewal, this day and always. Amen.