

Sermon: Defining Moment: Giving up our Sorrow by Pastor Jenn

Gospel Lesson Matthew 28:1-10 and Second Lesson: 1 Peter 1:3-9

I was working on the sermon for this week, and in the background, I heard my iPhone shuffle some songs, when all of a sudden John Lennon's Greatest Hits came up and the "Happy Xmas" song came on. You probably know the song, it's actually quite a well-known song because while in the midst of having Christmas fun with colored lights, presents, and holiday glee, there's this in-your-face song, that says, "And so this is Christmas and what have you done? Another year over, a new one just begun " And the refrain in the background builds, saying, " War is over! If you want it! War is over now". It's a powerful song when you think about it. Lennon takes seriously the message of Christmas and confronts the listener with do we just celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace, or will we actually change our attitude, our life because of his birth.

It's Easter, the Lennon challenge laid before us is, do we just celebrate what God has done for the world through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, or will we allow this event to actually change our attitude, change our life? In other words, "And so this is Easter, and what have we done?"

If we look at that first Easter story, we see the changes it brought to the disciples named Mary mentioned in our opening text. Consider what they had seen and experienced in one week's time. On Sunday, the first of the seven days, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey to the shouts of "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" The crowds believed this was the man whom God had sent to save them. It is he who will take over, ruling them, wiping out the Roman Empire. That is their thought, and their hope, he is their Hosanna.

Then according to the gospel of Luke, on Monday this hosanna walked into the Jerusalem Temple and overturned tables where a money exchange occurred, as some of the Temple authorities were making the Temple a place of profit rather than a place of prayer. And so, this is the only time we see Jesus get physically angry, and rightly so, His father's house is being desecrated, so he drives the money exchangers out, and remains in the Temple for the next few days, teaching and reminding people about God's way. Though at nighttime, we are told, he went to the Mount of Olives to pray.

On Thursday, in an upper room, Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples. It would be the last time he would be with the ones he had come to love as brothers and sisters, and as they were gathered, he gave this ancient celebration a new meaning. The sacrament we call communion was instituted; the new covenant established by God through Jesus. Later that evening in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus agonized in prayer at what lay ahead for him, while some of the disciples slept, and another sold him out for money with a kiss.

On Friday, the fifth day, following betrayal, arrest, and imprisonment, Jesus will be deserted by most of his disciples, though not these Mary's. And Jesus will experience false trials, receive endless beatings, and be condemned by the same crowd who hailed him as a king. They will now mock him because in their minds, no king would be arrested and take it, no king sent from God would not defend himself and His God without using power or violence as the other kings did like of the old days. Therefore, Jesus is not who they thought he was, and for his betrayal of their hopes, they will now yell "crucify him!"

On this same day, Jesus will then carry his own cross to "The Place of the Skull," Golgotha, where he was crucified with two prisoners, mocked, and teased, while at the same time ministering to the daughters of Jerusalem and one of the criminals, even praying to God for the forgiveness of those involved. Then Jesus dies.

By Saturday, the cross was empty as Jesus lay dead in a tomb. Mary and Mary had lost their friend, their loved one had died.

Which is why early on Sunday morning they went to the tomb to express their feelings for their rabbi, their friend, by treating his body with an embalming oil to preserve him, which was a Jewish custom. The oil they would have used was probably myrrh, fulfilling the prophetic gift a wise man gave to Jesus so long ago.

But when the Marys arrive, they experience an earthquake, and while the guards lay still, the Marys receive the good news from the angel, *'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised,*

On that first Easter morning, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the wife of Clopas, went to the tomb sad and hopeless, offering one more act of love to their teacher, their friend. However, they did not anoint a corpse, because he was not there. Jesus was alive.

In fact, the text says, *8So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples. 9Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him.*

The risen Christ meets the women on their way, and they take hold of him, which is Matthew's way of showing the reality of the resurrection. Jesus is not a spirit, nor ghost, he is real, tangible. And they worshipped him. And this is powerfully good news because the resurrection is not just the ending to the story of a man named Jesus, rather it is the act of God entering into the realm of death, and lifting the lost, the hopeless, the fearful, back to life. It is the defining moment of giving up any and all sorrow.

Peter writes about it like this in his first letter: ³⁻⁵ *What a God we have! And how fortunate we are to have him, this Father of our Master Jesus! Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we've been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for, including a future in heaven—and the future starts now!* Jesus Christ, the risen Savior over death, destruction, and pain, the everlasting God incarnate, comes to us, and offers a new life that begins now.

Paul Harvey in his annual Easter message said this, "Jesus lived a good life in a wicked world to show us that we can too. He died and rose again to show us the same"

Easter offers the good news of what God is doing for you and me, through Jesus and what Jesus can do through us for the world. We offer hope and joy amidst the sorrow.

We received a video this week from our connectional missionaries, Ruslan, and Archie, who serve in Ukraine. Our congregation, as well as many others, have been sending them financial support in order for them to open their community center, church, and home to refugees where they are fed, loved, and helped to move through the war. This past weekend they had a community celebration of a blessing of a wedding. In the midst of war and sorrow, the living hope is there, celebrating God's will of life and love to carry on.

And so, this is Easter, and what have we done? However, your life has been, don't let it be unchanged by this incredible gospel. And don't bypass its meaning too quickly. Just as it happened to the Mary's that first Easter morning, and as it is happening through Raising Hope Ukraine, God wants your weary heart to take in the beautiful liberating gift offered in Jesus Christ, to enable you to break free from all that confines you -the worries, the pain, the sorrow- break free from those things and believe in this gospel. Trust this gospel. Live this gospel. It can and will change your life with a brilliant and glorious hope through the Risen Son, who blesses us now and forevermore.

Sermon Response: At this time, I want to share a poem written by our own, Rev. Phil Juras that ties in well with our message today.

Poem: Early in the Morning by Rev. Phil Juras

Verse 1

I went down to the tomb early in the morning
I was so sad and deep in mourning
And when I arrived, I didn't believe my eyes
The stone was rolled away
But it must be a different grave
It must be a different grave

Verse 2

So, I went up to the tomb and gazed on in
Empty was the place and roll'd was the linen
And there sat two figures who looked dressed in white

And frightened as I could be
“He is not here” they said to me
“He is not here” they said to me

Verse 3

“You knew him well you will see him again
Go back to the city and tell your friends,
He is risen; they will see him too
The Lord with all his might
Over death has won the fight
Over death has won the fight.

Verse 4

So, I rushed back to tell the things that I’d seen
About the empty tomb where he had been
And the message that the angel had given to me
“Christ is risen today”
“Tell the folks that you meet on the way.”
“Tell the folks that you meet in the way.”

Verse 5

He came to us there gathered in the room
He broke the bread and showed us his wound.
And then we all knew it was really true
He had risen from the dead
Just as he had said.
Just as he had said.

Verse 6

Now my friends if you feel that you’re all alone
Remember that he said you’re “one of his own.”
He’s risen to life that you might live
Sin and death are sent away
Because of Easter Day
Because of Easter Day.