

Resurrection Sunday: "Fully Restored"
Salem United Methodist Church
John 20:1-18; Acts 10:34-43
April 5, 2015
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We have made it through Lent. Here at Salem we have been journeying to the cross and the Resurrection with a sermon series is called, "From wRecked to Restored." Each week we saw how God can take the worst things in our life, and even the not so bad things, and restore them into a new existence, into something beautiful, something that has purpose. Well, we have arrived again at this moment in which we discover how God through the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus has the power to fully restore the world and our lives.

Last week we gathered and shouted, "Hosanna, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." As we waved palm branches remembering Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, we entered into Holy Week knowing what would happen to Jesus: his betrayal, his arrest, his crucifixion, and his resurrection. We knew we would be here once again, shouting, "Christ the Lord is risen. Alleluia!" And then the week began. That very afternoon, this church welcomed those who grieved the loss of a wife, sister, mother, and grandmother. By our quiet presence, we provided a place to reflect, laugh, and celebrate the life and resurrection of a neighbor. Many said that they that our hospitality made them feel welcomed and wrapped them in God's comforting love. As the week unfolded, we continued to watch in horror as more information was revealed about the pilot who committed suicide by crashing a plane into the Alps and taking 150 people with him. We continued to grieve with the families and prayed for God to grant them peace and comfort as they faced their losses. Then on Thursday we woke up to a more troubling horror, the killing of nearly 150 Christian students at Garissa University in Kenya by militant Muslim extremists. These young people who were destined to become leaders in their country were killed because they believed Jesus to be the Son of God. And we are reminded yet again, that there are those who will kill in the name of religion. People will do great evil believing that it is in God's will. This horrible theme is echoed over and over again in our history. As Christians we stood at the cross this past Friday and we were reminded yet again, that people in the name of religion took an innocent man who preached about the love of God, who healed people, who had done nothing wrong, and executed him on the cross. With the reality of all of the week's events settling in, the clouds swept across the sun. Darkness crept into our souls; the darkness is part of our human existence. And we cried out, "Why, God? Why? Are you really there?"

The disciples of Jesus experienced this on that fateful Friday. Thomas saw the world collapsing around him. Peter felt guilty for denying Jesus when Jesus needed him the most. For John, the Beloved Disciple, the reality of the moment hit him when Jesus wants him to care for Mary, the mother of Jesus. And Mary Magdalene who experienced the grace and forgiveness of Jesus remained committed to him well past his last breath. There seemed to be no hope for the future, or at least not the future they had hoped for. The darkness of death crept in. Death, too, is part of our human existence. It will come to all of us one day. If we haven't experienced the death of a loved one, we will. One day we will all experience our own death. This week I received word that a friend from my youth was declared brain dead after a fall. He was buried yesterday. We went to the same school and participated together in the various youth ministries at our church. I was shocked to hear of his death as the fond memories of our youth flooded in. His death reminded me yet again that we will all die. Death is part of our human existence.

But then morning comes. The sun rises. It is a new day. We discover that the tomb is empty again. Panic is upended by surprise. Fear turns to joy. Grief ebbs into hope. Resurrection happens. We are fully restored. There is no more pain, no more sorrow, no more crying. The partying begins. Did you know that when Jesus described heaven he described it as a wedding reception? In Jesus' day, the wedding reception was the event of the year. It lasted seven days and nights. The entire village partied and celebrated the love between two people they knew and loved. Heaven is a place where we gather with those we love and party eternally. There is no more pain or sorrow, only joy. The promise that there is this perfect life in heaven with Jesus after our death is one of the things the Resurrection offers us.

But wait there is more... Someone asked me once, "If there was no promise of heaven would you still follow Jesus?" In other words, if the Resurrection of Jesus didn't happen, would you still be a Christian? These are thought provoking questions. What would your answer be? My answer was a resounding, "Yes!" And here is why. When I follow Jesus, when I am serving him, doing what I know God has called me to do, doing what is right, offering hope and compassion, caring for others, loving others, serving others, doing whatever good I can, the darkness disappears and the light of Christ shines. I am more alive when I am doing the things Jesus told us to do than any other time in my life. Jesus spoke more about how we are to serve others selflessly than he did about heaven. Think about the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon of Jesus is all about how to live your life by putting God and others before one's self. The Good Samaritan story is about serving someone who may see you as an enemy. And then there is Matthew 25 which does speak about receiving an eternal reward based on how we cared for those in need. I love this quote from N. T. Wright who wrote the book, *Surprised By Hope*. He writes, "Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of God's new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven. That, after all, is what the Lord's Prayer is about." We pray this every Sunday, "Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven." We are to be agents of God. We are to colonize the earth with the life of heaven. That's our mission of the new life we receive in Christ. This is the other thing that the Resurrection does for us. We are to be co-creators with Christ setting the world aright, to turn curses into blessings, to seek justice and righteousness, to be co-creators in restoring the Paradise, the Garden of Eden, that we were given originally. The Resurrection is God's invitation to begin the process of restoration in our lives, the lives of others, and in our natural world. The Resurrection calls us to respond, "Here I am, Lord, send me, use me, restore me so I can be an instrument of your restoration."

Mary Magdalene experienced this restoration first hand. Do you remember back in Genesis when God created the Garden? We refer to God as the Gardener-the one who tended the Garden. Do you remember who Mary Magdalene stumbles upon when she steps out of the tomb into the garden? She thinks the person talking to her is the gardener until he calls her by name. Then she recognizes the gardener to be Jesus. The restoration of the world has begun. The Gardener is at work restoring the Garden, restoring it and us to our original beauty. The restoration process began in the Beloved Disciple, John, when he realized Jesus had risen from the dead. The restoration process began in Peter and the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them and breathed the Holy Spirit on them. The restoration continued in Peter when Jesus met him by the shoreline, forgave him from his denial, and immediately sent Peter out into the world. And the restoration process began in Thomas when Jesus met him and met his skepticism with love and grace. Thomas' questions were answered and he recognized Jesus as his Lord. Each was restored in their own way and each realized that the world would never be the same again. And it hasn't been. This process of restoration has been happening in and with each generation.

This process of restoration is happening in each of us today. Can you identify with any of these disciples? The skeptic or questioning Thomas? Peter who was quick to deny ever knowing Jesus? The Beloved Disciple who knew Jesus loved him? Or Mary Magdalene who was totally committed? Restoring us fully is what the resurrection is all about. It's not about Jesus. It is about Jesus rising from the dead to give hope to us, to those of us who are burdened by sin and those of us who are oppressed by those who sin against us. Christ's death and resurrection happened for us to restore us into wholly and holy people with compassionate hearts for God's people. Christ's death and resurrection restores the image of God originally placed in us, polishing it until it shines in us and through us. The dark tomb could not hold Jesus in. He opened its door and invites us to follow him out of the darkness into the wonderful light of the new dawn. So today and every day we can remember this new life Jesus offers to us as we shout, "Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!"

Reflection Question: How is the Resurrection restoring your life? Your family? Our community? Our world?

References: *Surprised by Hope* by N. T. Wright