

Resurrection Love
Mark 16:1-8; I John 1:1-5; Acts 10:34-43
Salem United Methodist Church; March 18, 2018
Rev. Dr. Sue Shorb-Sterling

Today is both April Fool's Day and Easter. Sounds like a really bad joke. April Fool's Day is a silly day in which we prank one another. And Easter is kind of a serious time. The last time this happened was in 1956. Anyone remember it? Our spring has been like a bad April Fool's joke, hasn't it? Who would have thought ten days ago that Easter Sunday would be such a beautiful spring day? This weather reminds me of a story my grandmother would tell about a Palm Sunday surprise on March 28, 1942. They went to church. The weather report stated that it would cold and rainy. It was raining when they went into church. When they got out of church, there was about a foot of snow on the ground. What a surprise! She said, "I had on my Sunday dress shoes. Everybody had on their best shoes. Nobody brought snow boots. We had no idea it was going to snow!" They trudged through the snow, got in their cars, and struggled to get home. She said that they couldn't see the road, had to abandon their car, and walk the next few miles up and down hills as the cold wind blew biting snowflakes in their faces. By the time they got home all their Sunday shoes were ruined and their feet were frozen. Every family has stories that we pass down to the generations. It's one way we keep the memories alive.

Telling the story is how we know about the Resurrection of Jesus. There were no hidden surveillance cameras to record the event. According to the story, there were no actual witnesses of the event, either. No one saw the actual Resurrection. All we have are the accounts of the women who were going to the tomb to care for the body of Jesus. On Friday when Jesus was killed there wasn't time. They barely got the body of Jesus off the cross and into the tomb before the sunset. As good Jewish women they were not allowed to work on the Sabbath from sunset on Friday until sunrise on Sunday. Just as the sun is rising, they set out with their spices to complete the burial process. The spices would mask the foul smells of the body decomposing in the dry climate. They came prepared, but forgot about the stone. It was too heavy for them to push away. Just as they are contemplating this dilemma, surprise! Someone dressed in white appears. This is no joke, nor prank! This is the real deal. Jesus is gone. He is raised from the dead and isn't there.

You know that initial feeling of fear and dread we have when someone pulls a prank on us. When my son was five, he had a realistic looking toy mouse. My mother is scared to death of mice and he knew that. When we would go to her place, he would bring his toy mouse and put it places where she would discover it. Every time she would jump and scream in fear. And he would laugh at her. Well, that's the fear that Mary Magdalene, Mary, and Salome were experiencing, but it wasn't a joke to them. Jesus was gone. He wasn't in the tomb. What did it mean that he was raised from the dead? Or perhaps someone stole his body? What would this mean for them and the rest of the disciples? They were terrified. The term, resurrection, was a concept that some Jews believed would happen someday, but early on a Sunday morning, it certainly was nothing they could comprehend. What was happening?

About twenty-five years ago I was reading a novel in which the main character discovers an ossuary, a burial box which held the bones of Jesus. Even just the idea that Jesus never was raised from the dead and actually stayed dead, threw me into a tailspin. I panicked, threw the book down, and walked around the house saying, “No, no, no. This cannot be happening!” Jesus rose from the dead. We know this because of the stories that have been told. The Resurrection story is in each Gospel. The disciples tell of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus over and over again. Some of these are recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. The story was passed down orally until it is written down about thirty to forty years later in the Gospels. It wasn’t a story someone made up to protect the disciples. It wasn’t a prank or a joke. It was real! Was the blizzard of 1942 just a story my grandmother liked to tell or was it real? Others wrote about it and today information about blizzard of 1942 can be found on the internet. Did it happen or was it a story that someone made up? It really happened! No April Fools!

The Resurrection of Jesus wasn’t a prank that was played on the women. After some time they would learn what the Resurrection of Jesus would mean. The words Jesus had told them about how he would be bodily raised from the dead began to echo in their memories. After they and the other disciples saw and witnessed the Resurrected Jesus, they began to comprehend that Jesus wasn’t just another Hebrew prophet or a faith healer who threatened the religious authorities and was executed by the Roman Empire to keep the peace. The Resurrection changed their lives. Peter, a fisherman, who seemed to be more of a dunce than a leader becomes a powerful speaker proclaiming forgiveness through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Thousands came to believe in Jesus because of Peter’s retelling of the story. Saul was literally transformed into Paul when he was threatening to murder those who followed Jesus. He is changed from a Jesus hater to a Jesus follower. Unlike Peter, Paul never knew the human Jesus. Paul experienced Jesus through another dimension-where God enters from eternity into our real time. This is not a dimension that can be proven scientifically, but dimension that remains a mystery to us. Yet, we know it when we experience it. We know the transforming nature of the Resurrection when we think we are so weak we can’t take another step, and then we begin to receive the strength to move forward; when we are sinking into the abyss and then we feel ourselves being pulled up and out; when in the midst of grief and sorrow, we discover the joy of living; when darkness seems all consuming, and suddenly there is a pinhole of light shining on us; when our self-centeredness is turned into focusing on the needs of others; when we face a life-threatening health issue and we survive it; when we are terrified, and our fears turn into faith; when we have done another harm, and we know we are forgiven; when we feel unloved, we come to know Christ’s love for us. That’s Resurrection Love.

When Jesus was asked what are the two greatest commandments, he answered, “Love God and love each other.” Jesus did. He took his love for us to the cross so that we could be transformed by God’s love. We become the children of God who are called to love others and transform the world. The Resurrection of Jesus gets the last laugh, not Death. And that is no April Fool’s joke. He is risen! He is Risen, indeed! Alleluia! This story of the Resurrection still needs retelling so future generations will come to believe. With whom will you tell the story?

