

Easter Sermon Series: Resurrection Healing; Sermon Title: Why Mother's Day?

Psalm 23; John 10:11-30; Revelation 7:9-17

Salem United Methodist Church; May 13, 2019

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Today is the fourth Sunday of Easter. As a grieving grandmother, I have not yet arrived at Easter. My alleluias are still hollow. I know like many of you what it means to stand at the cross and watch someone you love suffer and die as a result of that suffering. I know like many of you what it is like to cry uncontrollably from the depths of your soul in unbelief that something so horrible could happen to a loved one. And yet it has. The women, who stood at the cross and watched in horror as Jesus was being crucified also experienced this depth of grief. When the darkness of night descended, the Sabbath began. They had to go home and go through the Sabbath rituals of worshipping, resting, eating, sleeping, sitting, and talking, while reliving those tragic moments from the day before. The Sabbath day gave these women a day to sit with their grief. Since the end of March when our granddaughter suddenly became ill and spent time in intensive care, I have been traveling to the cross. I so wanted to get through Easter. But then Good Friday happened. I found myself standing at the cross, crying in disbelief, "Why did this happen to a vibrant, smart, compassionate, and talented ten-year-old girl who wanted to make a difference in the world?" There is no answer. I am slowly moving from the cross into the day of Sabbath. I have sat and slept and ate and talked and remembered as I grieve our loss. I grieve for her parents and her sister, too. Yet, in the midst of the Sabbath, the women who wept at the cross made plans to carry on when the Sabbath was over. When the sun rose marking the end of the Sabbath, they gathered what was needed to finish preparing Jesus' body for burial and leaned on each other as they walked to the tomb. They didn't know that the tomb would be empty. They didn't know that Jesus had risen from the dead.

I have this knowledge of an empty tomb. I know that because of Jesus' resurrection there is hope- hope for new life in this world, and hope that death is defeated, that eternal life is a reality. I know this, but I am not walking to the tomb yet. I am still sitting, sleeping, eating, talking, grieving, remembering, and beginning to make plans for when the sun rises. One of the plans I made before Good Friday was to think about what a Resurrected Life looks like. Pastors have to plan ahead. I was planning ahead for the Easter season. I stumbled onto this book called, *A Resurrection Shaped Life: Dying and Rising on Planet Earth* by Jake Owensby. The premise of this book is that we can experience resurrection in our ordinary lives on the earth now. To experience the resurrection is to experience healing in our lives. Healing from hurts in our past, from suffering, from shame and blame, from loss and sorrow. When we allow ourselves to face our pain and let go of it, then the healing power of the resurrection can happen. As I have read through this book, I began to move toward the Sabbath day. As I move through this book and preach from it, it just might assist me in moving toward the empty tomb and receive some healing for my grieving soul. During this Easter season, I may be preaching to myself, but hopefully all of us will be able to benefit from the healing power of the resurrection.

In addition to today being the Easter season, it is also Mother's Day- day in which we remember and celebrate the women in our lives who physically gave birth to us, who nurtured us, who mentored us, or who gave us children. According to the National Retail Federation, Americans will spend nearly twenty billion dollars today honoring their mothers. So why do we go to all this fuss over mothers? Perhaps somewhere in the recesses of our minds and souls we remember that there is a commandment which states that we are to honor our mothers...and our fathers. Father's Day is next month. Or perhaps there is more to celebrating Mother's Day. The roots of Mother's Day go back to the Civil War. Ann Reeves Jarvis, a member of Andrews Methodist Episcopal Church in Grafton, West Virginia, began Mother's Day work clubs that tended to injured soldiers from both sides during the Civil War. Many of these were grieving mothers whose sons were killed in battles. After the war, Jarvis organized Mother's Friendship Day picnics. Their purpose was to promote peace and unite former foes. Like the women at the cross, these women grieved, yet planned for a new day. Ann's daughter, Anna Jarvis, wanted to honor the work of her mother and organized the first official Mother's Day at her mother's home church in May 1908.

Both the women at the cross and the mothers from the Mother's Day work clubs recognized suffering and wanted to do something about it. The women at the cross wanted to care for the body of this remarkable, innocent

man who was executed. Post war mothers wanted peace and a unified nation. Both groups of women could not stop the suffering, but they did what they could. Mothers know something about suffering. They suffer pain when they give birth to children. Mothers suffer, too, with their children whenever their children suffer no matter what the age of their child, or from whatever their children are suffering. Mothers suffer for and with their children. Suffering is a reality in our world. We still have diseases, infections, illnesses, and cancers. We still have wars that destruct ways of life. We still have one group of people who seek to control another by inflicting suffering on another group. The mother of Jake Owensby was sent to a German concentration camp as a teenager, not because she was Jewish, but because she was in the wrong place at the wrong time. She barely survived.

No matter if the suffering is inflicted by others or as a result of living in this imperfect world, we wonder why? Why is there suffering? Even Jesus asked, “Why?” from the cross. Why does God allow suffering in the world? Why death? In this world, there is life and death. There is birth and there is death. With each new birth there is hope for tomorrow. With each death, as Christians, we believe there is the hope of eternal life. Perhaps asking “why?” is the wrong question. Perhaps we should ask, “How?” How will God bring meaning to suffering? Owensby’s mother was changed by her suffering. She saw the hope in each new day and she reached out to others who were suffering in some way. We only need to look at how God brings meaning to Jesus’ suffering and agony on the cross. God shows us that in suffering and death there is new life. Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection offers the world healing in the midst of suffering. In life, Jesus restored the physically and mentally ill. He fed the hungry. He built relationships with cheaters and betrayers. He forgave, even when people didn’t ask for forgiveness. In life, Jesus was all about restoring this broken world, which threatened both the religious and political powers, so they had him crucified. Jesus allowed the suffering of his dying to happen so he could even further heal our broken world. Jesus talked about this when he said, “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” (John 11:17-18). Then in his resurrection, Jesus offers new life. In the resurrection, we see that death has not won. Life wins. We see that sorrow and suffering can be reshaped into new ways of living. Our lives can be reshaped as we both suffer with others as the post-Civil War mothers and Owensby’s mother did. And our lives can be reshaped when we step out in faith and choose to suffer for a higher purpose like Jesus did, when we set aside our wants so we can help with the needs of others and be part of their resurrection healing. Both suffering with others and suffering for a higher purpose create new life and healing, create a resurrected life.

Like a mother gives us life, so the Good Shepherd gives us resurrected life. Like a good mother suffers with and for her children, the Good Shepherd suffers with and for his sheep. We know his voice, just like we know the voice of our mother. Like a good mother, the Good Shepherd cares for the sheep meeting all their needs. Like a mother who puts a band-aid on a cut, the Good Shepherd anoints us with oil to heal our wounds. The Good Shepherd walks with us through the valley of shadow of death so we need not fear. The Good Shepherd even lays down his life for us and becomes the Sacrificial Lamb so that we can receive the complete healing from suffering and live where there is no more sickness or crying, where there is no more hunger or thirst. The Sacrificial Lamb becomes our Shepherd who leads us to the springs of the Water of Life.

As I move into the Sabbath day between Good Friday and Easter morning, God is wiping away my tears. Springs of the Water of Life have appeared through notes and cards, through hugs and acts of kindness and compassion. All of these remind Chuck and I that people are praying for us and of the new life our granddaughter has received. They are like a healing oil being poured over our deep wound of grief. It will heal in time, but there will always be a scar as a reminder that life and death exist in this world and remind us to have the hope of the resurrection in Christ.

Reflection Questions: When have you experienced suffering and how did God create meaning and healing from it? Or how is God creating meaning and healing from it?

Resources: *A Resurrection Shaped Life: Dying and Rising on Planet Earth* by Jake Owensby; “Mother’s Day Turns 100: Its Surprisingly Dark History” by Brian Handwerk, www.nationalgeographic.com