

***Easter Sermon Series: Resurrection Healing; Sermon Title: Mending
Psalm 67; John 25:1-11; I Thessalonians 5:1-11; John 14: 1-4, 18-19, 25-27
Salem United Methodist Church
May 26, 2019
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While our nation is remembering Memorial Day this weekend, the church, is still remembering Easter. We are still remembering the Resurrection and delving into what that means for us. Besides taking passages from the Bible, I am using two books: *A Resurrection Shaped Life: Dying and Rising on Planet Earth* by Jake Owensby and *The Universal Christ* by Richard Rohr. Both speak to the healing power of Christ's Resurrection. Today we are focusing on "Mending from Loss and Sorrow." Almost everyone one of us has experienced a great loss or a deep hurt. In the midst of our suffering, what role does the resurrection of Christ play, if any?

I remember as a child sitting on our front porch in our small town and watching the Decoration Day parade march past our home. It concluded just a block up the street in the cemetery. There on a stage in front of a section where Civil War soldiers were buried, our town had a ceremony with a speaker who remembered those who died in service to our country. The origins of Decoration Day began after the Civil War—a war that killed so many soldiers from both sides that national cemeteries had to be established to bury all of them. Can you imagine the degree of loss and sorrow that ran through families and towns? Just about everybody either knew someone or was related to someone who died in a battle. Can you imagine the amount of both individual grief and communal grief that permeated everything? If you have ever experienced the loss of a family member or a close friend, you know that grief feels like your heart has been ripped apart. And when this happens, we want to yell at the world that is going about its business, "Stop! Don't you see that I'm hurting!" After the Civil War, this part of the world did stop because it was hurting. The loss was so great. One of the ways that they dealt with their grief was by placing flowers on the graves of the fallen soldiers as a way to heal from such a great loss. I can only imagine the number of tears that flowed as they walked from grave to grave. A loved one may have been buried hundreds of miles away, but there were graves of someone's loved ones in a nearby cemetery. Laying flowers on these graves was an act of remembering your loved one with the hope that someone was doing the same for yours. Decoration Day became not only a way to remember and heal from this great loss, but also a way to join together to find communal meaning and significance from all the suffering. Decoration Day gave birth to our Memorial Day in which we still remember the loss of those who gave their lives for our country and in which we still seek communal meaning and significance from the devastation of wars. Tomorrow we will name those we knew who died in the line of duty.

Richard Rohr writes, "There is a Great Sadness... Sometimes the pain is so huge and deep that it feels like it will never end ...Almost all people are carrying a great, secret hurt, even when they don't know it." Memorial Day is an outcome of a great sadness. Memorial Day is a mark of resurrection life as well. God knows something about our sadness and suffering. The Crucified God in the form of Jesus is a dramatic way of showing us that God is a God who chose to suffer. The Crucified God not only suffered for us, but also enters into our suffering. We do not suffer alone. God suffers for us and with us. God understands our suffering and never leaves us. Rohr calls this the "Christ option... a God who is in total solidarity with all of us at every stage of our journey, and who will get us all to our destination together in love." We all live. We all love. We all suffer. We will all grieve, and we will all die. The joy in this journey of life is that we believe in a Christ that is in total solidarity with us in our suffering, in our grieving, and in our loss.

However, when we experience the death of a loved one, we do not experience joy. In his book, *A Resurrected-Shaped Life*, Jake Owensby tells a story of a man whose wife died suddenly. She wanted her funeral to be a joyous celebration of her life. Her husband told Jake, "People keep telling me that she's in a better place. To hell with that! She belongs right here with me." I can identify with the rawness of his grief and I've said these words, too. Yet, Jesus assures us that God is with us in our grief. There is a holiness in the midst of our pain. God will stay with us in our suffering and when we are ready the compassion of God will lead us into a birth process of new life. The empty tomb becomes a womb for hope, a womb bringing forth eternal life that can begin in the now. Paul wrote about the labor pains of new life to his new, small congregation in Thessalonica. They were

understandably struggling with the idea of the resurrection of Jesus. They expected Jesus to return any day so that they could receive eternal life. Paul tells them it may not happen this way. He states that resurrected living may come when we show up, when we are alert, when we are ready, and when we encourage one another. And this is the message Jesus offers in the parable of the ten bridesmaids. Jesus' parables were designed to make us think and challenge our assumptions. This parable does that. This parable is about the Kingdom of God being near and it challenges us to think about where and when we encounter God. Five bridesmaids missed the moment. They left. And five bridesmaids showed up and experienced a holy moment. The parable teaches us that the Kingdom of God is near and arriving soon. Will we be present? Will we be aware? Will we be distracted? Woody Allen stated, "I have learned one thing, 'Showing up is 80 percent of life.' Sometimes it's easier to hide home in bed. I've done both." Five bridesmaids showed up. They couldn't share their oil. They had to be there. They couldn't miss the moment. Both Paul and Jesus in different ways are saying new life happens when we show up.

When my grandfather received word that his only son was killed in Italy during WWII, he stayed in bed for over a week. Gradually he was called out of the tomb of his room into a new life. He began showing up for his family again and was there for them over the years as they suffered different kinds of losses. We experience grief because we love. We love people. They are woven into the fabric of our lives. When they die, it is like the fabric is torn to shreds and we feel like we won't survive. God's comfort does not numb us from our grief, but begins the process of mending the threads into a new fabric, a new life, a new hope. The kingdom of God is always near. Show up. Be attentive to the suffering and pain around you. And allow God's compassion to draw you into those moments of resurrected living.

Jesus said, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they will be comforted." What does that comfort look like? As one who has experienced a loss recently, it looks like a three-inch stack of notes and cards. Some are from people I don't know. Some are from people I haven't seen in almost fifty years! Comfort looks like people listening online to a concert in which our granddaughter should have been singing. Comfort looks like people listening online to her memorial service. Comfort looks like hugs from people who care. Comfort looks like people listening to the pain. Grieving and suffering are not meant to be done alone. If we do, we will wallow in self-pity or become preoccupied with ourselves. Grief and suffering are meant to be shared. And it is in our sharing we find comfort in each other. In our sharing, we become Christ with skin on to each other, nurturing the emergent new resurrected life. Since our granddaughter died on Good Friday, I said a few weeks ago that I hadn't arrived at the empty tomb yet, but I hoped working through this sermon series, might help me get there, might help me move from her death into a resurrected life. And it is, along receiving the love, sympathy, care, and empathy through cards, gifts, books, meals, hugs, and listening.

Just as grief and sorrow cannot be done alone, so a resurrected shaped life cannot be done alone. Resurrection is not just a one-time event. Resurrection is an ongoing process in which we are changed in a positive way. When we look back, when we remember where we were and where we are. When we look back, we can see Christ's Resurrection at work in us and through us. Resurrection means that life is not ended. It has only changed. We live into the resurrection through our connectedness with each other and with the Risen Christ. These times of connectedness, these times in which we show up, create moments of holiness in which the Risen Christ comes into our midst bringing with him the healing power of the Resurrection into all of our lives.

Reflection Questions: We experience resurrection in the depths of our sorrow. How did Christ respond to you in the midst of your grief? We experience resurrection in our compassion with those who are grieving. What did you learn about God's love while you walked with those who grieved?

Resources: *A Resurrection Shaped Life: Dying and Rising on Planet Earth* by Jake Owensby; *The Universal Christ* by Richard Rohr