

Lenten Worship Series—Christ Acts For Us
Sermon Title—“The Most Important Act”
Matthew 28:1-10; Acts 10:34-43
Salem United Methodist Church
Resurrection Sunday—April 12, 2020
Rev. Dr. Sue Shorb-Sterling

Six Sundays ago, we began our Lenten journey with the hope of celebrating the Resurrection today, only to be told two weeks into Lent that we needed to stay at home and practice social distancing. Four weeks into this public health crisis, we entered Holy Week mumbling that Easter won't be Easter this year because we can't be at church. There will be no trumpets playing or people singing collectively, “Christ the Lord is Risen Today.” There won't be any Easter Egg hunts and the wearing of Easter bonnets. It's as though the Grinch is trying to find a way to stop Easter, saying, “Pooh, pooh to the Christians ... They're finding out now that no Easter is coming!” Or perhaps, the skeptics are thinking that maybe this year, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary will finally complete their mission of anointing the body of Jesus and then go home to grieve. But a sound began at dawn so quietly that any believer could hear it. “Fear not, for in the silent, dark, cold stone cave, I proved once and for all that nothing: no war, no virus, no economic collapse, no empty pews, no illness, no death, can keep me from rising.”

I have to admit that I was one of the skeptics who thought we can't have Easter unless we are all together at church. I even said at one point, I think we should continue to have Lent until we can gather together again, and then celebrate Easter. Several here tried to find a way for us to gather in the parking lot for an old-fashioned drive-in theater style of worship. We would have stayed in our cars practicing social distancing and blowing our horns as a way of passing the peace, but our wi-fi signal wasn't strong enough outside to zoom for those who couldn't come. So, the idea was nixed. But silly me, silly all of us, who thought this way. Easter isn't about getting together, or about the Easter Egg hunts, or wearing bonnets. Easter isn't even about singing our favorite Easter hymns. Easter is the Resurrection of Jesus the Christ. And this doesn't depend on me, or you, or any of us. The Resurrection of Jesus the Christ has already happened over 2000 years ago, continues to happen every day, and will continue to happen until Christ comes again. We need the Resurrection now, more than ever!

Resurrection is the Divine nature of God saying, “Darkness, disappointment, and death do not have the final word.” In fact, artists over the centuries, who have attempted to paint the Resurrection, something no one witnessed, have used beams of light as an expression of the Divine overcoming darkness. They

have painted the Risen Lord with light extending in all directions from him. The Risen Lord is not a resuscitated body waking up from death. Richard Rohr explains the Resurrection of Christ in his book, *The Universal Christ* this way. "The single physical body of Jesus moved beyond all limits of space and time into a new notion of physicality and light. Christians usually call this the 'glorified body.'" The human dead body of Jesus is changed into a live divine body of the Christ. That is a wild transformation, a crayzee, mind-bogglin' change. In the absolute bleakest of moments, the Christ rises from the dead body of Jesus to open a new reality for *all* humanity for *all* time. This is how Christ acts for us.

The Resurrection of Christ *is* the defining moment. The story of the Resurrection was told over and over again throughout human history. Each Gospel tells the story of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. The four Gospels do not contain the same stories of the life of Jesus and his teachings, but the story of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus is included in each. Even before the Gospels were written, the disciples who were afraid and hid behind locked doors after Jesus' execution, don't stay inside any longer, but go and tell the story. Remember Peter, the former fisherman, who denied Jesus after his arrest? After encountering the Resurrected Christ, Peter is changed, transformed to the point that he steps courageously outside the laws of his faith, outside the social customs, and enters into the home of his enemy, a commander in the Roman army, to tell him and his family about this unbelievable event, the Resurrection of Jesus. And Peter gives the reason for it, "For he is the Lord of *all*...He is sent from God to judge *all*, the living and the dead...*all* who believe in him will find forgiveness of his sins." Do you know for Peter to say these words he was committing treason? To say that anyone besides "Caesar is Lord" was punishable by death. Peter who was scared to admit he knew Jesus before the guards on the night Jesus was arrested, now by the power of the Resurrected Christ has the courage to speak treasonous words to the-tough-as-nails commander who ordered many tortures and crucifixions for much less. Even before this story was written in the Acts of the Apostles, Paul wrote this about the Resurrection, "Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not *all* die, but we will *all* be changed." (I Corinthians 15:31). And we still tell the story of the Resurrection. Here is how we can tell it this year.

There are three things that the Resurrection of the Christ and the Covid-19 virus have in common. First, both are for *all*. We know that Covid-19 is the great equalizer. Any and *all* can catch it. We hope and pray we can stop its spread so not *all* get it. The Resurrection of Christ is for *all*, no exceptions. Peter proclaimed Jesus is Lord of *all*! Paul wrote that we will not *all* die, but we will *all* be changed.

Second, both the Resurrection and the virus changes lives. The virus has already changed our lives. We have experienced disruption, uncertainty, and

loss of jobs, of human contact, of opportunities. In fact, our lives will probably never be the same. The thought of this kind of change can be frightening for some, or welcomed by others. It depends on our outlook. The same is true about the Resurrection. Paul claimed that *all* will be changed and he admitted the mystery of it. We don't understand this miracle of new life, but we do know that it entails change and transformation. When that change occurs in our lives, when that resurrection transformation happens, (It happens differently for all.), we will see the created world through the lens of Christ's love. We will become like Christ sharing his love to *all*. Where there once was despair, there is new hope for tomorrow. Where there was once fear, there is faith that no matter what happens we will get through this, whatever the "this" is. Our new, resurrected life in Christ gives *all* assurance, hope, and love. This is the most important act Christ does for us.

And third, both the Resurrection and the virus are defining moments in the history of the world. This is the first Easter in the history of Christianity that the church doors have been locked, yet it will be the most memorable one. We will be able to tell the stories of how Easter came this year, even when there were no Easter lilies, eggs, or bonnets. We will tell future generations how we sat at home and Easter came to us. We will tell the story for generations to come of how in the midst of fear, anxiety, discouragement, separation, loss, and death, we found courage and hope because Christ rose to bring us new life. We will be able to tell the story again and again that this Easter "God sent His son, they called Him Jesus. He came to love, heal, and forgive. He lived and died to buy [our] pardon. An empty grave is there to prove [our] savior lives." We will tell those who come after us the story of assurance that, "Because He lives, [we] can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone. Because [we] know He holds the future, And life is worth the living, just because He lives." This is the Resurrection hope! Alleluia! He is risen! He is risen, indeed! Amen.



Resources: *Christ is For Us* by April Yamiasaki; *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, by Dr. Seuss; *The Universal Christ* by Richard Rohr; "Because He Lives" by Gloria and William Gaither

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