

Easter (2020)

During this Lenten Season, we journeyed with Jesus throughout the 40-days, and "The Three Days" that began Maundy Thursday evening and encompassed Good Friday and the Easter Vigil. We read God's word, fasted from Holy Communion for much of Lent, prayed, and longed to worship together as a church family once again. This time of the Coronavirus Pandemic has been very confusing for us (perhaps even challenging for us). Yet, many have found these past few weeks to be a time when their faith has deepened. When faced with uncertainty, when faced with unsettling news, some persons may want to flee and turn away from God. But most will keep their faith and focus even more intently on the one, Triune God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God who is our refuge and our strength. God who is always present with us wherever we may be. God who is our hope in times of trouble.

Like those with the Coronavirus which has "fallen on them," we remember with sadness Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus' sentence to death on the cross had "fallen on him," due to those who refused to accept him as the Messiah. His 12 disciples shadowed him for 3 years, following his footsteps. They observed his life, his teachings, his healings, his joys, his challengers. In his final days, some of them may have created makeshift living quarters to be near his cross, to be near his tomb, to be near him. Perhaps some kept socially distanced from him, not wanting to do so, but needing to do so to protect their aching hearts. Perhaps some had forgotten Jesus' words prior to his death. Perhaps some were expecting Jesus to come down from the cross and demonstrate his power..... Perhaps some just fled out of fear or anxiety.

Yes, Jesus was in the most trying of circumstances, and his problem, was a heart problem. Jesus' heart was not only heavy from his multiple attempts to persuade Israel and the Roman officials to recognize him as the Messiah, but from his betrayal by Judas, Peter's denial,

and the words and actions of other Christ followers during the events leading up to his crucifixion. And now.....Jesus' earthly heart.....was..... silent.

In his book, The Case for Easter, Lee Stroebel describes Jesus' crucifixion as death by asphyxiation. "[E]ven before he died...the hypovolemic shock would have caused a sustained heart rate that would have contributed to heart failure, resulting in the collection of fluid around the heart...and the lungs." (p. 21).

Jesus' death affected his heart both physically and figuratively. It reflected the depth of pain that he endured and his physical heart failure. It also reflected the figurative strain on his heart; the strain that reflected his great love for God the Father and humanity. For Jesus, God's only Son, who was fully divine and fully human, refused to use his divine power to save himself. Instead, he accepted the will of God the Father--God's will be done, God's will be done even unto death. Jesus' heart was silent. Jesus was dead, and Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus laid his body in a tomb.

A lawyer once asked Jesus, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest? Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." (Matthew 22:36-37).

Mary Magdalene loved Jesus. She, and the other Mary came before dawn on the first day of the week to Jesus' tomb. Their hearts were heavy. They had been through the most challenging of times, watching Jesus' pain and suffering. Perhaps they too had created makeshift living quarters so they could be near him. They knew there was nothing that they could do for him now. They could not imagine the possibility of a bright future without Jesus. All their minds could think of was darkness, and all their hearts could feel was emptiness.

But as they approached the tomb, there was an earthquake and an angel came down and rolled the stone away. The angel spoke to them saying, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples." Jesus was not there! They ran to tell the disciples, but then they saw Jesus! They fell down, held his feet and worshiped him. Jesus said, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

The women's sadness and heartache has turned to joy. The tomb is empty! Christ is not dead. Christ is alive! Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Jesus had told the disciples about his death and resurrection many times in many different ways. He said to them, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me." (John 14:1) And, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14: 6) For Jesus directed his disciples, and us through his words. Jesus is our compass, directing and leading us to the one, Triune God. Jesus' words foreshadowed his death. And through his death, Jesus created a relationship for us with God the Father. Through believing in Jesus, we know God's grace and receive the gift of salvation; a gift that allows us to be close to Jesus now and forever.

Catherine Marshall, in writing about her late husband, Peter, who was considered to be one of the greatest preachers of the 20th Century, stated, "To Peter Marshall, the compass needle of Christianity pointed inevitably to Resurrection morning." (The Best of Peter Marshall) It is Resurrection morning, and the compass needle is pointing to Jesus. For Jesus' death and resurrection have brought all Christian believer's the possibility of everlasting life. Through Jesus and the one, Triune God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit,

Resurrection Sunday has come and with it the wonderful news that Jesus Christ has overcome death. "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again." When Jesus' earthly body died on the cross, death was destroyed and through the power of the Holy Spirit, salvation and new life began for all Christian believers.

In times of uncertainty and change. In times of stress and uneasiness, let us turn our hearts, our souls, our minds to Resurrection Sunday, and the hope that we find in Jesus. Yes, Jesus' heart was heavy, but he knew his future. He knew that he would lose his earthly body, but his faith and trust in God the Father's will, allowed him to do the unimaginable for any human being. He died for us. He died for the whole world, to atone for the sins of all humanity. Only a divine person could do this. Only Jesus could do this.

Theresa of Avila (1515-1582) embraced Christ's teachings, his death and resurrection, in this inspiring poem...It speaks to us now, as it has spoken to Christian believers for almost 5 centuries.

Christ has no body but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
Compassion on this world,  
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,  
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.  
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,  
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.  
Christ has no body now but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world.  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours. Amen.

While we cannot physically be near Jesus, as the disciples, Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, and other persons who lived in the First Century, we can be with Jesus in other ways. We can read scripture. We can pray. We can do Jesus' will as his servants during this challenging time and in the future. Being his servants, can be one way in which we demonstrate to the world

that Christ is not dead. Christ is alive. And God the Holy Spirit is working in us; working in our hearts, and in our minds. We do not do his works to gain merit, but because we are moved to Christ-like service through the outpouring of God's love in our hearts. The Holy Spirit kindles our faith, so that we desire to do God's will, to be God's servants in word and deed, and to help others throughout this hurting world.

Jesus said, "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid." (John 14:27) Jesus died for us. His great love continues now and forever. His love for all that he has created, is a love that has no bounds. Jesus' death was not the end, but a new beginning; a new life for many in the first century, in the years that followed, and a new life for all who believe in him now and in the future.

The Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians (3:16-18), " I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is."

Thanks be to God. Amen.