

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Lake Edge Lutheran Church

April 8, 2015

John 20:19-31

IT'S NOT OVER YET

It's good to see you here on this Sunday after Easter. Last Sunday we celebrated the great reversal, God's April fool's joke on the devil, the world, and our sinful and mortal flesh. God played his hand or should we say hands, the wounded hands the hands of Jesus who came forth from the grave. Jesus showed his wounded hands to his disciples, evil and death lay defeated. It may seem a bit anticlimactic to come here on this second Sunday of Easter. Not everyone is here. I'm glad you're here. For you see, it's not over yet, Easter isn't finished, nor will it be until God decides it is. That's my theme as we consider the Gospel on the first Sunday after Easter, "It's not over yet."

It wasn't over on that first Easter Sunday. Someone had missed out on that great event on the first day of the week. Thomas hadn't been with the other disciples when they had seen the Lord. He came a week later with a great deal of skepticism. He wanted not only to see the wounded hands and side. He wanted to touch them, to feel those wounds so that he could know that the one who was tortured and died, his teacher, the one for whom he had given up everything and followed was really alive. And Jesus showed up. We don't read that Thomas actually touched the wounds. I like to think that he was so overwhelmed by the presence of his risen Lord that he forgot about feeling the wounded hands or plunging his hand into Jesus side. We only hear that he gave his great confession, the highest we hear from the lips of anyone within the pages of the New Testament, as he cries out, "My Lord, and my God."

But even notice the other disciples on that Sunday after Easter. We find them still locked in fear. We find them behind locked doors. I would submit to you that the opposite of faith is fear. Easter faith has not reached deep into their lives. They were in fear. Easter still had to unfold in their lives. It's not over yet.

And Easter wasn't over after that either. There are further experiences of the risen Christ in the next chapter of John. In one they fail to recognize Jesus. In another Peter is tested for his love of Jesus. It wasn't over then and it isn't over now.

A few weeks ago I joined the Save Our Lives march in Madison. Instead of being paralyzed by fear and hopelessness, young people and families took to the streets augmented by quite a few geezers like me...a resurrection moment!

This past week Sheryl and I traveled with an interfaith group to Washington D.C. to be a part of an interfaith group protesting racism on the 50th anniversary of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King. Without knowing each other, we had been a part of a group in 1965 that participated in an educational program out of Tuskegee Institute in rural Alabama at a time when Jim Crow was very much still in place, but it was beginning to crack. It was the summer of the March on Selma. It was a time of tension and some danger. We have come a ways since then but not near as far as we would have hoped. And there have been relapses, like the one we're experiencing in our nation currently: hence the need to gather in Washington D.C. this past week to celebrate and claim anew the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King. The overwhelming message of the gathering was not past accomplishment but how much further we have to go to reach the goal of racial justice. Dr. King was convinced that the arc of history moved toward the Kingdom of God. To me it's not always clear whether it moves that way or towards an apocalypse which seems very possible at the present. But either way I believe that the God of the resurrection and the life is always before us. I believe that the world would have met its end at human hands but for the restraining hand of God. I believe the resurrection still unfolds in faithful people who uphold the justice and purpose of God. It's not over yet.

Perhaps you are familiar with the experience of Dr. King early in his ministry, recorded in his book, *Strength to Love*, which he called "a kitchen table conversion". He had come to Montgomery, Alabama, to lead a congregation and had been thrust into a leadership position as the leader of a bus boycott by African Americans tired of sitting in the back of the bus as second class citizens. After one late night threatening phone call he was ready to give up. He bowed over the kitchen table and prayed over a cup of coffee. He vividly remembered

the words he spoke to God: "I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right but now I am afraid. The people are looking for me for leadership and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone.

"At that moment," he said, "I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never before experienced him. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice, saying, 'Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth, God will be at your side forever.' Almost at once my fears began to pass from me."

From fear to faith, a resurrection moment. He said the outer circumstance was the same but God had given him an inner calm.

And on some personal notes:

My first wife, Joan, died of ovarian cancer in 2002 following a difficult year and a half battle with the disease. I remember so well the last Easter we experienced together. We had a tradition of one of us being the first to say "Christ is risen." To which the other we give the traditional response "He is risen, indeed." It was a sort of contest. On Joan's last Easter she was no longer able to leave our home. I got up in the dark to get ready for the sunrise service, being very quiet to not wake her. But her quiet but clear voice came to me in the dark of our bedroom "Christ is risen." Of I said back to her, "He is risen, indeed."

The Easter following her death the hymn following the sermon was *I'm so Glad, Jesus Lifted Me.*" I don't know exactly what came over me, just maybe the Holy Spirit, but I got up and started dancing to the song before the congregation of three hundred or so people at the late service. I often think of that when I see so much movement here at Lake Edge Church during the music. The good news of the resurrection has meant so much to me, the assurance that even death cannot triumph over the love of God. Some of you here have come to know how important the promise of resurrection is in the loss of a loved one. Easter continued and it's not over yet.

Not too many years after that I experienced a heart attack and had two open heart surgeries within four months. The second time there was a problem after the surgery. I suddenly couldn't breathe. I experienced panic. I learned

later that the space between my lungs and the lining around the lungs was filling with blood. After initial panic I suddenly felt a deep calm. I felt that I had probably accomplished what God had for me to do with my life. I did not fear death. I remembered Paul's words from his letter to the Romans that "nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" and that whether we live or whether we die we are the Lord's. The Risen Christ with his wounded hands reached me there.

I thought I had died and when I woke up it took some time to realize where I was. It wasn't good enough to be heaven. It wasn't bad enough to be hell. I guess I'm back and here I am.

Since then I have had no fear of death. Easter continues and it's not over yet.

The movement of resurrection is from fear and cowardice to faith and courage. The movement of resurrection is from hate to love. The movement of resurrection is from oppression and injustice to the just reign of God, the Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed. The movement of resurrection is from death to life. It is the hope of new creation and, yes, of heaven.

The Jesus of the wounded hands is with us again this morning. He offers his body broken and blood shed. He is able to reach deep into our lives, to places of hurt and confusion, of brokenness and despair and doubt, of pain and loneliness, of failure and sin. He reaches us with wounded hands, this resurrected Lord with forgiveness and encouragement, with compassion and deep understanding. And perhaps with Thomas of old we say in our heart of hearts, "My Lord and my God." Resurrection happens again and again in our lives. The reality of resurrection is alive in our world. It's not over yet.

AMEN.