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Squamish United Church
Easter Sunday

April 24, 2011

Readings:
John 20:1-18

Looking for Jesus

If you have ever been to church on an Easter Sunday you have heard this story before. Mary's search for the risen Jesus is a core story of our faith. As a clergy person I am often asked if I believe in the resurrection and my answer is always yes. Without a doubt I believe. Something miraculous, supernatural, inexplicable happened on that first Easter day.

How did it happen? I do not know. What did it look like? All I have is the stories of faith like you do. What do I know? I know that my entire faith is based on the belief that somehow the love and life of God and Jesus are fully present and alive today - just as alive as they were thousands of years ago.

This day - This Easter day - calls us to celebrate life. To break out of the dark tombs of our lives and discover God calling us forth - defying all darkness, all evil, all death. This resurrection day is a day that calls us to new life. Perhaps not just because we find it in the season of spring we might see the hop of a bunny on Easter day as a celebratory jump for joy. Perhaps these daffodils might be a symbol of colorful abundance breaking out of the cold dark ground. Chicks breaking out of their eggs bursting are forth into life. And butterflies emerging from tight cocoons beat all the odds. This day we celebrate LIFE OUT OF DEATH, ABUNDANCE TROMPING ON SCARCITY, AND LIGHT BURSTING OUT OF THE DARKNESS.

This is the day that God has made and on this day we recognize God with us. This is the day of our faith when we celebrate the reason we are Christians. Without this day there would not be a history of thousands of years of followers of Christ. And so on this day we recognize the places where God and Jesus meet us and others.

We just heard the story of Mary - Jesus' close friend who went to see where he was buried after he had died. A grave in those days would have been somewhat like a cave with a stone rolled over it - kind of like one we have here.

So imagine if you were Mary and you had gone to mourn the loss of your close friend and when you arrived you found the stone had been rolled away and your friend Jesus was not there. *How do you think Mary would felt in that moment?*

exactly... lost, afraid, angry, panicked, - her head must have been spinning. Her heart must have been racing.

But then there were two messengers there and they said to her “Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He isn’t here. He’s alive, he’s just gone on ahead of you to Galilee. Go and look for him there!” Now Mary was both frightened and excited - she went and told the other disciples and immediately they followed her and came to look for Jesus as well.

When I thought about about Mary and the disciples searching for Jesus I thought about us in this congregation and how we are often asked to find God in our daily lives. And so I wondered once again where we might find Jesus today - if Jesus is like God with us and the spirit of Jesus is found within us *where do you think we might find Jesus in our world now?* *We meet You O Christ*

Today I thought we might consider this a little bit more by looking at stories from the bible that showed us where Jesus would have been found in that day.

First of all we might find Jesus among children, because Jesus really loved children. In fact when people tried to push children away from Jesus he got frustrated with them and told the children to come and play and talk with him. There are a lot of stories of how Jesus listens to and cares for children just as much as he listened to and cared for adults. Like this boy.

The Story of the boy with loaves and fishes

Something happened to me when I was young.

I was with a whole bunch of other people who were following Jesus.

I’d gone with my friend’s family to listen to him tell his stories on the other side of the lake.

My mom had packed me a picnic.

At one point Jesus stopped talking and said something quietly to his friends.

They all looked very worried.

I knew Andrew (one of Jesus’ disciples) because he was from our village and so I went a little closer to hear what they were talking about.

I heard Andrew say something about people being hungry and Jesus wanting to feed them.

I pulled on his sleeve and told him that my mom had packed a lot of food for me and I could share it if they liked.

All of the men with Andrew heard me. I know they did.

But as grown-ups usually do - they ignored me.- and pushed me off.

But Andrew grabbed me by the hand and took me straight to Jesus and told him what I had said.

I was nervous. I had’t been this close to a prophet before.

I wondered what Jesus would do.

I tried to tell Andrew to forget it but he persisted.

I was sure I was about to get into huge trouble. But Jesus smiled at me gently and he talked to me and asked me my name and then he asked if he could take my lunch. I was star struck. I couldn’t even speak.

I handed my lunch to him and then Jesus took the bread my mom had baked and the fish she had bought at the market and somehow Jesus shared it with everyone.

I like Jesus.

*He listened to me even though I was a child
He even let me help him. He made me feel important that day. And now that I'm a little older I realize that it is even more amazing that Jesus cared for people's real needs. On that day he knew people were hungry and he thought feeding them was even more important than telling his stories.
Jesus made me so happy that day. I have told people about him ever since.*

Yes. I think Jesus would be found with children, listening to them, caring for them, spending time doing the things they love to do. I think Jesus would especially be with children who have hard lives. There are many stories of Jesus healing sick children, and caring for those in need. I am sure we would especially see Jesus with the children.

But not only with children. I think we would also find Jesus with people who are poor and need help. We would find Jesus spending time with people who can't even get jobs and don't have enough money to live on. Like this man

Blind Bartimaeus

*I followed Jesus after I met him.
There was no point in me just sitting at the side of the road in Jericho anymore. Now I could see. Jesus had healed me.
I had been blind. I sat at the city gate and begged for food and money just to survive. I was totally dependent on others taking notice of me and caring that I made it through another day. But now could see where I was going, I could choose for myself what I wanted to do for a change.
And so I got up and I followed Jesus. I followed him for a whole week.
I even saw him ride into Jerusalem.
He rode in on a donkey you know.
I enjoyed watching the crowd celebrate him.
I celebrated him too - after all he had changed my life.
I listened to him when he told stories.
But I also noticed that his enemies were never very far away.
I was there when he carried his cross through the streets on the way to the crucifixion.
I almost wished I was blind again.
That was too painful to watch.
For the first time I saw the sadness in his eyes.
He still offered such love but the sorrow was too much for me to bear.
Eventually I went home to Jericho.
People weren't sure how to look at me or talk to me.
I was a different man.
I didn't need to beg anymore - but I didn't have a job.
I didn't need someone to lead the way and I could fend for myself
It was scary and exciting all at the same time.*

And it's still like that:

Every day I see something new, every day I become more independent.

I have learned how to cook and fish, I'm even learning how to read.

And now I see people smile at me. I like that.

Jesus changed my life - I am more alive and it feels so good.

I think we still can find Jesus walking among people who are struggling - offering them new life and hope; helping them face their fears and see new things. I think Jesus still gets angry when countries and governments and even regular people act like their power and their money are more important than the people who could use a helping hand.

That is why I think we would also find Jesus among the people who are treated unfairly. We would find him with those who don't get an equal say, and with people who feel that they don't belong.

Jesus met a lot of people like that; sometimes they were foreigners or outsiders; maybe they had a different religion or spoke differently. Sometimes other people disapproved of them and would put them down like this woman.

The Samaritan Woman

I was nervous when I saw him at the well. I always went at noon, when the heat was the fiercest so that I wouldn't run into anybody else.

It was best for me to go it alone. That way I wouldn't have to watch people point at me, and snicker and sneer and make comments under their breath.

And that way there was no one to bump into me on purpose so that I would spill my water. The people of my town look down on me because I have been married many times, and that is shameful in my culture. They especially don't like me because I choose to ignore them and keep living my life.

When I first saw Jesus I wasn't even sure if I would go to the well. But I needed water. I figured he would just ignore me because I am a Samaritan woman and Jews don't even speak to Samaritans. It should have been bad enough that I am a woman but to his people I am considered a heathen because we Samaritans are not the chosen people of God. But I know that I'm not evil or stupid, and deep down I think it might even be possible God would love me.

So I thought I would ignore him as well and just quickly get my water and go.

So you can imagine my initial surprise when Jesus spoke to me.

Right away I knew he was different. Jesus proved to me that I was worthy and I could be loved even by God.

It was like he was from a different world than everyone else. He drank from my bowl. He talked to me for a long time, as if I was worthwhile. He seemed to know everything about me. And then he told me this important thing, something you could only tell someone you trusted.

I couldn't help but tell everyone. I ran back to tell all the people of my town. I was sure they would laugh at me but I didn't care. I had to share my news. I had to break the silence. I shared with them that I had met Jesus and he had changed my life. It was like a brand new day. Now I am not known as the bad woman. I am now known as the messenger of the Good News of God's grace and love.

Morning Has Broken

I love how Jesus met with people who were outcast by others. Even today there are still a lot of people who are not treated equally. People treat them unkindly, and give them a bad time. There are many who feel very lonely and afraid. And I definitely think you would find Jesus making friends with those people, listening to them, taking them seriously, making them feel welcome and at home - and telling everybody else to do the same.

Jesus wants us to care for one another.

And that is how we find Jesus in our story today. He may not always stop people from being sad. Sadness is something we all have at times in our life. But God walks with us in our sadness and sorrow, just as God walks with us in our joy. We know this because Jesus stayed with people even when they were sad. Jesus would keep people company when they felt low and he would remind them that even if their friend had died or gone away their love was still there. And Jesus would ask them to live in love and to look ahead just like this woman was asked to do.

Mary's Story

I saw angels this morning, in the garden.

They asked me why I was crying

Angels must not understand what it is like to lose someone you love and not know where they have gone.

I cried and cried until through my tears, I saw a man standing in the distance.

I thought he was the gardener.

I asked him if he had moved Jesus' body.

And then the man said my name

"Mary" he said.

I turned to him in surprise "Teacher?"

Through the ache of my tears, I felt wonder and joy.

I wanted that moment to last for ever, but he gave me a job to do.

He sent me to tell the disciples what was happening.

I saw angels this morning ...

I saw angels...and then I saw Jesus.

And now I know true joy! Now I know that Jesus really is Life and Love!

Yes. These are the people I think we would find Jesus with. The children, those that share, those who are poor and suffering and outcast, those who need healing, and those who are alone and need love. I think we would find Jesus with all these people. We might not recognize him; in fact he might even look like someone we know. Scripture tells us that Jesus said I am the light of the world and he said we are the light too. Just like everyone we have just met Jesus asks us to shine the light of love each and every day so that everyone can know the love of Jesus.

This Little Light of Mine

Today as we celebrate the resurrection we are reminded that Jesus said “I have come that all might have abundant life.” And so we celebrate those who saw Jesus’ light and love in their lives. And we continue to celebrate God’s life and love with us today.

It seems we are always looking for Jesus in the wrong places. We search for God’s light among the strong and worthy people, when we should know the holy is more often found with the poor and the outcasts because we don’t spend enough time caring for the needs of our world.

Prayer

Holy One, we look in the wrong places and stay at a safe distance
but you come close to us, we find you even in our breathing, in the journey of our souls.

God we look for you in churchy things, but we are more likely to find you at the table sharing a meal, caring for those our churches might not so easily welcome in.

We look for you in buildings, and temples and yet you walked in crowded streets and shorelines and mountains.

Even now, even after Easter, we insist on trying to find you amongst the tombstones; among dead dogma and decaying fears and hurts,
we attempt hold you in within our guilts and resentments
and yet you break forth and ask

“Why do you look for the living amongst the dead”
God is not there.

Holy God, help us to lay down the grave clothes, roll away the stone
and come into life abundant here and now.

We know we will find you with the living
we know we will find you when we share your story
when we share your example of love
God of light shine into our place of darkness

and bring us to new life with you.

Amen