

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard
Easter Sunday

April 20, 2014

Scripture Reading:
John 20:1-18

Ordinary Resurrection

Frederick Buechner writes “It has always struck me as remarkable that when the writers of the four Gospels come to the most important part of the story they have to tell, they tell it in whispers. The part I mean, of course, is the part about the resurrection. The Jesus who was dead is not dead anymore. He has risen. He is here. According to the Gospels there was no choir of angels to proclaim it. There was no sudden explosion of light in the sky. Not a single soul was around to see it happen. When Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb afterward, she thought at first that it must be a gardener standing there in the shadows, and when she saw who it really was and tried to embrace him, he told her not to, as if for fear that once she had him in her arms she would never let him go, the way I suspect that if you and I were ever to have him in our arms, we would never let him go either. When the disciples heard he was alive again, they tended to dismiss it as too good to be true, and even when they finally saw him for themselves, Thomas still wasn't convinced until Jesus let him touch his wounds with his own hands. Later on, when they were out fishing at daybreak, they saw him standing on the beach, and there again they failed to recognize him until he asked them to come join him at the charcoal fire he had started on the sand and cooked them breakfast.

The way the Gospel writers tell it, in other words, Jesus came back from death not in a blaze of glory, but more like a candle flame in the dark, flickering first in this place, then in that place, then in no place at all. If they had been making the whole thing up for the purpose of converting the world, presumably they would have described it more the way the book of Revelation describes how he will come back again at the end of time with "the armies of heaven arrayed in fine linen, white and pure" and his eyes "like a flame of fire, and on his head many diadems" (19:14, 12). But that is not the way the Gospels tell it. They are not trying to describe it as convincingly as they can. They are trying to describe it as truthfully as they can. It was the most extraordinary thing they believed had ever happened, and yet they tell it so quietly that you have to lean close to be sure what they are telling. They tell it as softly as a secret, as something so precious, and holy, and fragile, and unbelievable, and true, that to tell it any other way would be somehow to dishonour it. To proclaim the resurrection the way they do, you would have to say it in whispers: "Christ has risen." Like that.”¹

¹Frederick Buechner's thoughts on "proclaiming" the resurrection, from "The Secret in the Dark" found in *The Longing for Home* and reprinted in the book *Secrets in the Dark*:

When I read this from Buechner I pondered how true it was. Sure it is an amazing story but it seems that Jesus appears - just shows up while these folks are attempting to get on with their ordinary lives. Jesus appears to the women while they are attempting to carry out the burial ritual. Jesus appears to the disciples when they are attempting to get back to fishing - doing what they know. Jesus even appears to the disciples when they are trying to hide from those they fear. Now the awe and amazement of the story really is something that should be as big as the proclamations throughout Revelations but the way Jesus appears, even after his death is more ordinary than that.

So I wonder if that is how God shows up to us even today in everyday resurrection experiences.

Let me show you what I mean.

What's this - A cocoon - that's right - now if you didn't know anything about this would you really expect a beautiful butterfly to come out of it? Resurrection?

What's this - A seed and dirt - again, if you didn't know anything about this could I convince you that a beautiful flower would come out of this? Resurrection?

I love the quote we have sitting here on this little pillow of hope "Anyone can count the seeds in an apple, but only God knows how many apples are in a seed" Resurrection?

And what about the egg - And this cute little chick - or if it's an Easter one it might even be Candy - Resurrection?

Easter is all about LIFE. The unbelievable life of Jesus that conquered death. And in conquering death we celebrate life and love. We are reminded that new life can burst out of the darkest of moments, and out of the most unexpected places. Maybe even the ordinary everyday places of our lives. Maybe that is where God shows up.

It's surprising what God can do. This day is the most surprising, amazing day we can possibly imagine and yet if we are honest God fills this world with the miracles of new life every day. Every day is this amazing.

"As the apostle Paul reflected on the death and resurrection of Jesus, it became clear that this was not a once-upon-a-time story. Rather, he recognized that this was a once-and-for-all-reality with implications that stretch farther than the eye can see and are larger than the mind can grasp fully. Jesus' resurrection is such a transformative event that it is as if the world now rotates on a different axis.

Paul understood from the start that the resurrection was not simply about what happened to Jesus; it is about what happens to all who trust in Jesus, and about what can happen to all who claim his story as their own. The resurrection is not simply the assurance that Jesus was

victorious over death; it is also a promise that we can share in that victory with him. The resurrection does not mean only that Jesus was triumphant over evil; it also assures us that evil will not be ultimately triumphant in our own lives.

Jesus is the first fruits, the initial harvest, of God's grace. But that is not the end of it. Not by a long shot. The resurrection of Jesus ushers in and reveals a promise offered to all. Saint Jean Vianney said of Easter: "Today one grave is open, and from it has risen a sun which will never be obscured, which will never set, a sun which bestows new life."²

So what is the Good News for us on Easter?

Perhaps it's that God is proven as powerful. On Friday cruelty had won. Evil had sealed Jesus into a guarded tomb. And on Easter, Jesus surprised them and came out of the tomb proving that God's ways are more powerful than any. One children's author said "It is the ultimate good guys beat the bad guys story." So if you think you are not worth much or you are not very powerful know that God has big plans for you. Look at what happened for Jesus.

Another piece of Good News here is that Easter reminds us that no matter what God is always with us. Jesus proves that God is with us through the whole journey, even to death and even after. It is just the way God is. Always there.

And we also see today that Jesus and God are all about forgiveness. Jesus forgave on the cross, he forgives Peter after the resurrection, he doesn't waste anytime getting back at those who have wronged him. He continues to simply love.

So on this Easter day and throughout this whole season go forth from here noticing the Resurrections happening all around you and then ask yourself what is God wanting to resurrect in me? See this isn't just a story for us to remember, this is a incident in history for us to live out of.

Anthony Robinson wrote "Resurrection is a word I like. In the Sunday papers and on TV there are "Easter Bunny Specials." Soft, sweet and safe. Resurrection is not safe. Resurrection disturbs, shatters, surges, a rushing mountain stream shooting between boulders, power that cannot be stopped. Resurrection is a word I like. On Sunday morning they thought he was safe - safely dead and buried, over, done, finished - finally. The One who put the question, the one who spoke the promise, the one in whom a new creation came near, the one who said, "follow me," was dead and buried safely.

Bring on the bunnies, flowers, candy, sports, spectacles and other safe substitutes for life.

² Copenhaver, Martin B. Calmly plotting pg. 51

Resurrection is a disturbing word, which says, we're never safe from God from the new life from life, from love. A disturbing, hopeful, shattering word - Resurrection is a word I like.

Let us go from here and live this ordinary, disturbing, hopeful, shattering Resurrection story of new life, abundant live for all the world.

Amen.