

Sunday, April 21, 2019

Acts 10:34-43

Luke 24:1-12

Empty Cross- Empty Tomb

Spring is finally here for we have seen flowers emerging from the ground- daffodils and tulips are in bloom and perennials are sprouting forth as they emerge in the heat of the sun. As we look to the buds on the trees and hear the birds singing as they fly around preparing their nests in the trees we know that new life is calling us to go outside and experience the smells of mud and see dandelions in bloom! God's promise that spring would follow winter is being fulfilled and there are signs of life all around us. This is one reason we gather together this morning- to rejoice in God's promises being fulfilled!

However this past week many people around the world watched with sadness in their eyes as they saw flames and smoke billowing out of the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. It was early in the evening on Monday when fire started to burn this iconic and monumental place of worship and it several hours with many firefighters to put out the flames. But what was amazing was how the world and its people commented on this cathedral on fire. This building is designated as a World Heritage site as it was built in 1163 and had withstood many battles in history and time. And as a functioning church, it is home to many practising Roman catholic people who when they heard the news of the fire went to the grounds and prayed and sang hymns of faith as they knew they would not be able to worship this Holy Week in this once beautiful gathering place. Hymns and prayers were heard as newscasters stopped talking because they were moved by the faithfulness of those who came, held a candle in vigil and cried as the building they called theirs burned. Even as President Emmanuel Macron proclaimed that they would restore this place of worship to its original glory the people were praising God because they believed that out of loss comes hope. This photo of what the cathedral looks like after the flames were put out to me expresses so much hope because the cross stands amongst the ashes and its golden shimmer shines brightly. There is hope beyond the cross because there is hope beyond the tomb.

On this Easter Sunday we remember what occurred as Jesus' story of love continues. After Jesus was crucified, his body was prepared for burial according to custom. His body was bathed and washed and anointed with ointments and perfumes. It was wrapped in clean linen cloths and then it was laid out in the tomb owned by Joseph of Arimathea. After this was completed those who had done these faithful tasks left and rested. The next day was the Sabbath and so they prayed and were uncertain at what

would occur next. Very early the next morning, the women wanted to grieve and mourn in the presence of Jesus' body and so they made their way to the tomb. But something amazing had happened!

They became afraid of what they saw. The stone had been rolled away and looking in the tomb, they found nothing! Then two men in dazzling white clothes stood beside them. They were terrified. But when asked 'Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen.' They were not sure what to think or do. So the women Mary Magdalen, Joanna, Mary –James' mother and the other women ran to tell the disciples what had occurred. But the disciples did not want to believe them. Yet when Peter ran to the tomb, stooped down and looked in he saw the linen cloths and went home amazed. He knew—Jesus was alive.

Jesus is alive! This story has been shared from one generation to another for 2000 years. This story of a man named Jesus who was sentenced to death by crucifixion a means of capital punishment where the person died a slow agonizing death filled with pain which lead to death by exhaustion and asphyxiation. But this man was like no other. He is Jesus, the son of God, Son of Man, the Promised One of God, the One who came in the name of God to save and help and answer the cries of those who sought better lives not only then (2000 years ago) but today as well. Jesus was nailed to the cross which was used for capital punishment. Yet the empty cross has come to mean so much more because of the empty tomb. In the cross of Christ we find glory because there is life beyond death.

Death could not keep Christ entombed because he is God's son who defeated death= and rose to live for ever more! And because of this there is hope for all people- all who have faith in God and who seek to know Jesus as their Saviour believe that there is life beyond death. And this life is eternal for we will live with God forever. If we believe in Christ's resurrection and why he died on the cross.

How do we explain Christ's mercy, overwhelming love, and gift of life? We explain it as best we can because God alone enabled this to occur and by faith we receive this new life for all of eternity. But we must have faith. Peter looked into the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there. He knew that Jesus was alive. But about you?

The cross is empty and today crosses are found in Christian churches around the world not as symbols of death where Jesus died, but of hope and life. The tomb was empty when the women and Peter went to it. They were told by the angels he is not here. He is risen. Why do we doubt this? Life is filled with rational explanations and proofs and theories but the angel told the women, He is risen. Peter knew where Jesus was and so should we. Peter knew Jesus was alive.

Even after enduring much heartache and loss, Job states, "I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth" Job 19:25-26. As a person of faith Job relied on God and he believed that the one who saved him was alive.

After coming to know Jesus as his master and saviour, Paul writes to the church at Galatia and professes his faith because he believed that when Christ was crucified Jesus took upon the sins of all people. But because of the resurrection he believed and by faith he knew that Jesus lived in him for he wrote, "I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." — Galatians 2:20.

As we rejoice and give thanks for Christ's resurrection on this Easter morning we praise God for the gift and hope of new life which Jesus made possible. New life filled with faith and hope. New life which leads us to our heavenly home with God forevermore. New life because the cross is empty and so is the tomb. Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. I know that my Saviour Jesus is alive by faith and with hope are you able to profess your faith and say Christ is alive and lives in you?

Let us give thanks to God for his gift of Jesus our Risen Saviour and Lord and let us come before him with thanksgiving. Let us pray:

Holy God of love and grace we praise you for raising Jesus to life and through his resurrection offering to us the gift and hope of life eternal. We believe in the resurrection of Christ enable us now to receive Christ within and know that he is alive in our hearts forevermore. SILENCE> AMEN>