

Sunday, March 27, 2016

Hebrews 12:1-3

John 20:1-10

Jesus is alive—Run, Go, Tell!

Happy Easter! This is the day that God made so let us gather together to rejoice and celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. Happy Easter! There's something odd about saying this greeting as Easter to me has to be happy—Jesus is alive. This is all we need to know to have faith in him for all of eternity! But knowing and believing that Jesus is alive is it enough? Or should we be doing something about it!

Jesus was nailed to the cross and died between two thieves that Friday just before the Passover celebration which took place about 2000 years ago. Crucifixion was the common method of capital punishment at the time. It was a normal activity to walk outside the city walls of Jerusalem and go to Golgotha the place of the skull to see who had committed crimes. The people would look and then seeing others they knew they would run and tell others the latest news. We have to remember that they did not have radio, television or the internet to find out the news of the day. They actually had to run and see news as it happened and by the time information was shared, new events would have occurred. Yet this particular Friday during that Passover celebration something different happened. The man many called teacher, a Galilean from Nazareth named Jesus had been crucified even though Pilate did not see a reason for his death. But it happened.

Jesus was on the cross when he spoke to those who loved him and to God. At the time of his death the sky grew dark, the temple curtain ripped and he said, "It is finished" and he gave up his spirit. His body was taken down from the cross and made ready for burial and those who knew and loved him were crying. Joseph of Arimathea offered a new tomb in which to lay his body. Jesus' body was prepared according to custom and placed in this tomb. A stone was rolled in front of the entrance and a guard was put there in case someone might want to steal the body and claim Jesus was alive. Those who were grieving Jesus' death returned back home and waited in fear for their own life and uncertain about their future.

Throughout Lent we have been focusing on the book of Hebrews and reflecting on how Jesus is greater than angels, people of faith whom we know from the Bible, priests and ministers of long ago and today, and that his death is the greatest sacrifice ever made for us and others. Our passage from Hebrews today invites us to run with perseverance because we have something worthwhile to share with others. It is up to us to tell others even though we were not the first to have good news to share about this man called Jesus.

We read in John's gospel about the early visitor Mary Magdalene who went to the tomb to grieve and to put spices on Jesus' body. She walked with a heavy heart but when she saw that the stone had been removed she ran back to where the disciples were. She told Simon Peter that the stone was moved and that the Lord's body was gone. Peter, the other disciple and Mary ran back to the tomb and there they saw strips of linen lying where Jesus body had been. They went back to their homes but Mary stayed and cried and went into the tomb. She saw angels who asked her why she was crying. She told them that she did not know where they put my Lord's body. And she was weeping. Outside the tomb a man stood nearby and asked he asked who it was she was looking for. She did not recognize him until he said her name. "Mary". She turned toward him and cried out Rabboni—Teacher. Jesus then told Mary to return to those who believed. Mary then ran back to the disciples and shouted, "I have seen the Lord."

There was a lot of running that Resurrection morning by Mary and the disciples as they back and forth to the tomb which was empty. They ran to see no body and yet Mary saw Jesus and heard him say her name and so she had run to tell them. She needed to share the good news of Jesus being alive. And so do we!

In Hebrews 12 we are call to run with perseverance the race we call life. We are to run and tell others that Jesus—the author and perfecter of our faith is alive. He endured the humility, agony and death on the cross and yet today as Christians we believe that Jesus is with God the Father.. this is good news and worth telling others. But are we really willing to do this and are we doing this in faith?

Sometimes it is easier to say nothing or do nothing. To expend energy by running to others and share news is not something we usually do because it is so much easier to text, email or call. Yet today we have Good News to share--the Resurrection of Jesus. This is the story of life out of death, hope out of despair and Jesus being alive after dying on the cross and knowing that He is with us right now. This the reality of faith carried by Christians for almost 2000 years. So how do you respond to this Good News?

When faced with different or new realities or understandings you have at least three options and it is certain that you will opt for one of these three possibilities. First- you can stay bewildered- that is you can let the whole story knock you flat on your back and then stay there. Second you can engage in world class denial—looking at the facts and ignoring them. Or third, you can slowly assimilate this new information. You might get knocked on your back by this realization but you pick yourself up eventually. You then embrace this new truth and go through the long painful process of reassessing life. .

This is the Easter choice: When faced with the incredible proclamation that Jesus rose to new life you can be agnostic and cynical by saying that you don't know what to make of this but then you will do nothing. You can deny it—as it is fiction, fantasy a wish but something that never really happened. Or you can move past the shock toward acceptance. And if you accept

the truth of the bodily resurrection of Christ—it will change you totally. That is the Easter choice.

The problem for many of us today is that we are not surprised by Easter to realize that we face a choice. Easter is a part of our history our background our faith story and we have just accepted Jesus' resurrection as something that happened and everyone knows about it. We've never been in awe of this- per se. It is a belief of many and passed down as something we accept from one generation to another. It is something almost considered routine that we acknowledge every year. We gather with family and have a meal and eat candy. And more often than not- Jesus is not mentioned at all. That is his life or death or resurrection. Is this what Easter has become for you?

Faithful Christians believe Christ's Resurrection took place not just because we've heard the story before, or that parts of it were made known as we grew up or movies of today have depicted the story and we visually see it- But there was a moment for us when we said "Wow" Jesus died for me. He rose to life so that I could live forever. Has this happened for you?

Are you looking for that "wow" moment so that Easter Monday will be different than last Thursday? Have you been searching for meaning behind the reason why movies and tv shows based on the lives of faithful people or Jesus are becoming more popular? Or why millions of people say they believe and need Christ in their daily lives? It is because there was a moment for each person when they said, Christ's resurrection does make a difference in my life. Jesus rose from death to life and because of this- I have nothing to fear. I will live with Jesus forever and as you continue to live your life on earth, your life will change.

What you hold on to as the most valuable is not what is in the bank or in the house or vehicle; what you hold on to are those whom you love and who love you. What will change is how Christ's message of unconditional love will move from what he did for you, to what you can do for others. What seemed so important last week- is not when you cannot share your time with those whom you care about. What a difference he will make in your life not only because he was born, but because Jesus lived, dies and lives again. And in all of this you will laugh and love, and be with others who share the same experiences. For those who believe gather each week to rejoice and have a celebration—a little Easter—celebrating anew that Christ is alive. This is what this church family is about as we continue to grow closer to God, to live the way Jesus taught and to prepare ourselves for that day when God calls us home to him.

Jesus told Mary after she embraced him as being alive, "Don't hold on to me; Go instead to my brothers and tell them I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Mary ran back to tell the frightened disciples. I have seen the Lord.

Is it true? If you believe in the resurrection it is a gift of faith granted by God's grace. If you have received that grace and accept the truth that gets proclaimed from every Christian pulpit in the world each Easter Sunday morning, then we have to know that this truth changes everything. This truth changes us—today and EVERY day. Run, Go and Tell everyone—Jesus is Alive!

SING prayerfully--- Because he lives!