

Sunday, April 28, 2019

Acts 5:27-42

John 20:19-31

Good News for Us All

From The Good News Network we read that LEGO is now piloting a new project that will use the bumps on their iconic bricks to help teach the Braille alphabet to blind and visually impaired children. LEGO "Braille Bricks" will be moulded with the same number of studs used for individual letters and numbers in the Braille alphabet, while remaining fully compatible with the LEGO System in Play. To ensure the tool is inclusive allowing sighted teachers, students and family members to interact on equal terms, each brick will also feature a printed letter or character. This combination brings a whole new approach to getting blind and visually impaired children interested in learning Braille, enabling them to develop a breadth of skills needed to thrive and succeed. Fewer kids are learning to read Braille, With thousands of audiobooks and computer programs now available, said Philippe Chazal, Treasurer of the European Blind Union. "This is particularly critical when we know that Braille users often are more independent, have a higher level of education and better employment opportunities. "We strongly believe LEGO Braille Bricks can help boost the level of interest in learning Braille, so we're thrilled that the LEGO Foundation is making it possible to further this concept and bring it to children around the world," added Chazal. This certainly is good news!

Last week we were saddened by the destructive fire at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. Many of the prized artifacts were saved because they had been put into storage due to renovations of the cathedral. This in itself is good news. But also reported is that the cathedral is also home to 180,000 bees with a beekeeper who looks after them. With the growing concern that the population of pollinating bees decreasing worldwide for several reasons finding out whether these cathedral bees were safe was very important. After the fire was out the beekeeper was delighted to receive the good news that the bees and their hives were safe. Smoke from the fire caused 180,000 bees to become sleepy and so they stayed close to their hives. Had the temperature grew hotter in the area of the hives all would have been lost. But they are all right and so this is good news for pollination to occur and for the production of honey.

As we gather on this Second Sunday of Easter, we continue to celebrate the good news story which has been told for and by several generations of people. Christ is alive. The Son of Man who was killed, buried has risen from death. This story from John occurs on the evening of the day resurrection

where the disciples have gathered in a house behind locked doors. Jesus appears and stands among them and says, "Peace be with you." Then after this, he shows them his hands with the nail prints and his side where the sword had pierced him. The disciples rejoiced when they saw Jesus alive. Then Jesus spoke, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Jesus was not dwelling on what had occurred at the time of his death, but in the early hours after his resurrection Jesus shares with them by breathing on them, Spirit of God and sharing the message that their sins were forgiven. This was certainly Good News as Jesus forgave them of their sins and blessed them in the Spirit. The disciples were now prepared to carry on their ministry as they had received God's Spirit. But a couple of questions arise for us as we consider this Good News story of Christ's resurrection.

What sins was Jesus describing for which the disciples needed forgiveness? Did they need to be forgiven because they left Jesus to die on the cross and they hid in fear for having associated with him? Did they need to be forgiven because they did not understand or remember his teachings of his pending death and resurrection? Had they even wondered what happened to him since Mary had seen him in the morning? What had they done so that they were in need of forgiveness? Had they doubted Mary and the other women's statements at seeing Jesus? Did they only partially believe that it could be possible that Jesus was alive and needed to see him and touch him to believe it? Did the disciples believe because they saw and touched Jesus or did they really believe that it was possible that he arose and was with them now? Was this why Jesus was offering forgiveness?

A little while after Jesus had left them, one of the disciples Thomas returned to where they had gathered and were still in awe of what they had experienced with Jesus. They were filled with excitement and joy as they shared, "We have seen the lord!" Thomas did not know how to answer and wanted proof that Jesus was really alive; he needed to touch Jesus hands and side and to really feel his presence. He truly doubted what the rest of the disciples now fully knew and believed; Jesus was alive!

A week later Thomas and the disciples gathered in the house and the doors were shut tight. Jesus appeared again and stood among them and greeted them saying "Peace be with you." He then turned directly to Thomas and said, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side." Thomas does this and then Jesus says, "Do not doubt but believe."

When Thomas touched him, and heard him, Thomas declared, "My Lord and my God" Then Jesus says, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Do you believe in the Good News of Christ's resurrection? Maybe you can identify with the disciples and how they responded to hearing this Good News for the first time. The women had told those closest to Jesus that he was alive. This included Mary whom Jesus called by name. Peter and John knew that He was alive as they saw the empty tomb and linens on the place where his body had lain. Later that evening the group gathered together in fear and while they were there Jesus stood amongst them and offered his peace and his forgiveness. We don't know what was said or done or what joy was filling their hearts. All we do know this was Good news. Then Thomas came later and would not and could not believe without proof of touching Jesus and seeing him for himself.

When did you first believe? Right away after hearing the story-- like Peter and John at the empty tomb? Or later on after hearing the story of Jesus' passion from different perspectives told several times. Maybe you believed some of the story or parts. Or maybe you are looking for proof that Jesus is alive in others through their acts and actions they do. You believe but still have questions or unbeliefs about the whole thing. Or maybe you have put your faith in the Risen Christ and have received forgiveness and blessings and honour from God. Or maybe you are just not sure, skeptical or even wondering in these moments as the Spirit of God moves amongst us. There is Good News for all people. Jesus' death and resurrection is for all people wherever you are in the spectrum of believing. Christ died for you; Christ rose to new life and through this you are forgiven of all sin. If you believe, profess your faith you will receive the gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus. This is the Good news for us all.

Today our world's scientists are discovering something new about God's creation. It was not that long ago that images of a black hole was filmed and released to the world indicating that what we know as our galaxy might be only one and there might be more to the universe than we generations have believed. What does this mean for us as we seek more knowledge and discover even more about this world? Do we believe in the Creator who made all things possible? Just what is the Good News we are to believe in?

After Jesus' ascension into heaven the disciples began their work of telling Jesus' story involving his life, death and resurrection and what this meant to people who would believe. The gift and hope of eternal life was now being shared as teachings of Jesus. The disciples were imprisoned for teaching Jesus' story as this was now their purpose even though they were told not to do so. But as the high priest questioned them and stated, "We told you not to teach in the name of Christ yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us." But Peter and the others stood firmly and answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority." Peter

than tells Jesus' story, "that it was God of our ancestors who raised Jesus who died by crucifixion and was raised to life as Leader and Saviour so that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins. The disciples then stated, "and we are witnesses to these things and to the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him." For this reason they must tell the story and share the good news of Jesus.

As Christians living almost 2000 years later, we should be grateful for the disciples who stood up for their faith in the Risen Christ as they appeared before the council for teaching about Jesus. They believed "We must obey God rather than any human authority." They knew Jesus was their teacher, rabbi friend and they also knew that he died and rose to new life for the sake of others. Jesus passion story is for all who seek to be reconciled with God and it is because of the disciples who shared their story in faith and with hope. There were people who wanted the disciples killed for doing what they did but after being brought to the Council but they were set free and told again not to speak in the name of Jesus. But of course they did not listen—for this is how the church became established as people of different faith backgrounds and experiences heard Jesus' story and the good news of new and eternal life in Christ.

The Good News for us all is that Jesus who died has risen and it is through him that we are able to be forgiven of all our sins- all those things which we have done wrong- and we can believe in Him to lead and guide our lives always. Christ came for all people- the non-believers, the skeptics, the unsure and those who fully believe in the resurrection and the eternal life Jesus' offers. This is Good news because Jesus will call us to him through the Spirit and not give up. Jesus meets us where we are and in what we believe or don't believe. All we are asked to do is listen to Jesus' passion story for the Good News possible for your life because of Jesus' death and resurrection. God's Spirit moves amongst us and we will be blessed with Christ's peace. All we need to do is listen, respond and act. For the Good news in Jesus Christ is that we are truly loved.

Let us rejoice, God we praise you as we rejoice in Christ's resurrection and how he dispelled the doubts of Thomas and all those today who continue to be skeptical. We pray that your Spirit will move amongst us enabling us to feel your presence so that we will renew our faith knowing that Christ is alive because he Lives within the hearts of all who believe. Bless us O God as we offer our lives to you in prayer and as we sing. Amen.