

Sunday, April 3, 2016

Hebrews 12:4-14

John 20:19-31

Love and Laugh

Just a few thoughts to begin this morning:

Noah was a very brave man. He set sail in a wooden boat knowing that there were two termites on board.

Something else: Why is it that there is no butter cream or cream cheese icing on crab cakes?

Another thought: Did Alexander Graham Bell call his mother regularly?

I share with you these opening thoughts because some days we just need to laugh and be ready to hear a good joke or something that helps us to relax. That is, we need to take time to enjoy the funny things in life and cherish those moments!

How many of you remember the joy you experienced last Sunday—Easter Sunday morning? It was a bright warm spring day and if there were children in your midst you saw the wonder of looking for eggs and surprises. There was probably a time when you were filled with laughing and wonder and of course chocolate surprises. When we gathered here, the joy of the Lord was in this place and the Spirit of the Risen Christ was truly experienced in word and song. This joy comes in knowing Christ as the Light but sometimes we need to lighten up and relax with each other. We need to share a smile and rejoice together. We are God's family filled with hope and love which goes beyond hugs and handshakes.

We know that the world outside these walls is filled with people who are hurting, sad, and faced with uncertain futures. There are many in our church family who are grieving and mourning and remembering their loved ones at this time when we see our faith put into action—Christ died and rose again. We are people who believe in the resurrection and because of this there is hope beyond the grave. There is the gift and promise of eternal life. And with this hope there is also joy—something that is sustained from within. This joy is because we believe

he conquered death and lived to tell others. He is alive and for this we should be filled with joy and laughter.

Later on the day that Jesus rose from death and Mary spoke with him and she ran and told the disciples. Jesus came to where the disciples were later that day but not all of them were there. Those that were, saw him and saw his hands and side where he had been pierced and put on the cross. The disciples were overjoyed. They had joy within themselves for Jesus was alive.

Jesus was there for a short time and left. However Thomas was not present and when they told him of Jesus' visit he did not believe. He wanted to see for himself. He wanted to be sure. So what happens is that later on Jesus returns and he then takes that moment when Thomas sees him as a moment to teach his disciples, the discipline needed in order to continue to follow him. Jesus says directly to Thomas, "Put your finger here see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe!" And then he said, "You believe because you see me; blessed are those who have not seen yet still believe!"

We are not sure the mood Jesus was in when he did this. Was he angry with Thomas because he needed to put his hands in his wounds or even because he was not there the day of the resurrection? Or was he in a good mood and wanting to discipline Thomas for his doubting in front of the rest the group- through laughter. Come here Thomas and look at my hands—my feet! They are still healing! What a precious time of gathering. The disciples might have been in a great and relaxed mood, or still frightened for their lives when Jesus returned to speak and teach Thomas. And yet there was also the inevitable to occur, Jesus needed to return to His Father in Heaven. Jesus still had to teach them about sharing their experiences and their faith in him. Jesus was again offering to the disciples the discipline that was necessary for them to share his story.

As we conclude our focus on Hebrews we read in chapter 12 that we are not to take discipline lightly. But we are to listen to the word of the Lord and know that it is through discipline we shall know that we are loved. We are to endure discipline for it is a way of learning, growing in faith and coming to understand God's grace offered to us through Christ Jesus. Discipline from Christ should be expected for we are followers of Christ. But we sometimes don't realize that discipline as a disciple of Jesus means that we will also tell others our story.

John and the other disciple did not believe Mary's story that the tomb was empty at first. It was not until they saw the linens lying in the place where Jesus' body had been lain that they believed he was alive.

As Easter people we are to submit ourselves to God so that we might be disciplined and taught and to live good lives and so that we might live in holiness. Discipline does not seem pleasant at the time but painful. And this is the case even with Thomas.

Thomas had told the disciples that he did not believe Jesus was alive. He wanted to believe it but only if he could see him. We don't know all the reasons why he doubted Jesus' resurrection but he could not accept it. But he is not alone in this, many others who hear this story are not totally convinced either. Yet this is one of the 12 people who knew Jesus best and he was called by Jesus to follow—to be a disciple and yet he did not believe the resurrection was possible.

Jesus returns to where the disciples are and goes right to Thomas and disciplines him—teaching him not to have doubt- but faith; teaching him that he should believe without seeing that is, have faith. And by having faith- they are to endure whatever comes.

Thomas and the rest of the disciples did not know what would happen next. They did not want Jesus to leave them but they had received the Holy Spirit and they were waiting to see what Jesus would call them to do next.

The disciples and all of us who are called to follow in faith are called to endure. God wants more for us than our happiness, God wants us to be holy and is willing to use hardship to accomplish this. Thomas saw Jesus' greatness and we are called to focus our lives on Him as well. If we do this, we will be able to persevere and endure, to receive grace and love where it was not thought possible. This is what being a disciple is about. Having faith in the Risen Christ even when you cannot see his scarred hands and feet. Having faith that there is life beyond death because of Jesus' victory over death as he rose from the dead. Having faith that endures no matter what happens in your every day life- and having faith leads you to new hope and understanding of where you are in relationship with Jesus the Risen Lord. This is what Thomas was seeking and did receive. This is the joy of knowing the Risen Christ.

PRAYER

God of love and laughter, peace and hope, we praise you for the story of doubt and faith and wonder. Enable us O God to endure through hope and to always know of the joy of knowing Christ Jesus! Amen.