

Sunday, April 8, 2018

I John 1:1-2:2

John 20:19-31

Powerful Message, Joyful Song

There is a method of teaching that calls us to repeat and recite, repeat and recite and I was reminded of this when asked about a poem learned as a child could be found anywhere. With the known words and of course the amazing internet in less than 2 seconds the poem was found. The amazing thing is that this poem was learned many years ago as part of recitation. Today's young people do not learn this, in fact for some kids, learning the multiplication tables is only done at home!

But we do know that if we want to remember something- we need to practise it and repeat and say the words again and again. Today I would invite you to do this by saying, "Powerful message, joyful song" Powerful message, joyful song. Powerful message, joyful song"

Powerful messages come and go. In light of the 50th anniversary of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. we can recall one of his famous speeches from August 1963. "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal."

Another powerful message shared on June 12, 1987 by former US President Ronald Reagan: "General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"

And this message shared February 29, 1984

"I walked until midnight in the storm, then I went home and took a sauna for an hour and a half. It was all clear. I listened to my heart and saw if there were any signs of my destiny in the sky, and there were none — there were just snowflakes." This was shared by former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, when he announced his resignation as prime minister of Canada.

Each of these messages are strong in nature, powerful in meaning and enduring in our hearts because of the circumstances under which these statements were given. But until I referenced them would we have remembered the context, the date, the individual?

In our reading from John's gospel (John 20) we pick up the story of Jesus' resurrection day. One can imagine what the disciples were thinking after all news that Simon Peter, the other disciple and Mary's story of seeing their teacher alive brought them all together in this locked room. They might have been talking amongst themselves and asking questions, "If Jesus was

alive, where is he; why doesn't he come to see us?. They might have even asked Simon, Peter and Mary to tell their story again and then ask, "Is it really true?" Suddenly, Jesus appears amongst them and speaks. He comes to them in the locked room but with a calming voice sharing words of assurance. "Peace be with you".

Jesus has not used this greeting before His resurrection but uses this expression of peace with His disciples. In the course of the evening, Jesus says this powerful message- "Peace be with you" and then he showed them his hands and side. They saw his body where the sword had pierced him and where the nails were in his hands and wrists.

The disciples were overjoyed. They weren't just happy to see Jesus and made eye contact with him. They weren't just joyful and a smile on their faces. They were overjoyed! They were jumping up and down, standing on the furniture, running around in circles, shaking each other's hands and hugging each other. Their faces were beaming—smiles and eyes wide open fully—Jesus is alive. Some of them might have even cried tears of joy as they were so overwhelmed with seeing their teacher, healing, preaching, friend and now Saviour.

Jesus then says, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." A second time Jesus offers his peace. But with this second time, Jesus also, breathes on them—stating, "receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven, if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

By Jesus' action of breathing on them—he is giving to them His breath of life and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through his words, Jesus is also giving to them the promise of forgiveness that they can share with those who come to them and seek it. Jesus' powerful words "Peace be with you," are spoken to his disciples. But there was a problem that evening. Not everyone was there.

Thomas for whatever reason could not be there. So when he did see them again, the disciples told them about what Jesus had said and done. But Thomas could not believe it. He needed proof. "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

It was a week later when everyone had gathered in the house again. Jesus came and stood amongst them and said, "Peace be with you." Then looking directly at Thomas, he said, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it here into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas then exclaimed, "My lord, and my God!"

Jesus then stated, "Because you have seen me, you have believed, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Throughout his ministry Jesus spoke and told many stories often in parables, he healed through words and by action, and his words shared from the cross have been remembered for over 2000 years. But when we hear the story of Jesus seeing his closest friends within the first week of his resurrection, what do we remember? Often the Doubting part of Thomas rather than the peace of Jesus.

Yet as Christians, people who believe and follow Jesus' teachings in our every day life we are called to many tasks. As Christians many of us have personal relationships with Jesus and consider Him to be as close as a prayer to talk with. There is a sense of hope beyond understanding placed in this relationships and often we are overjoyed like the disciples who saw Jesus alive. But as followers of Jesus we are to also do the will of the Father- God. And to do his will means go and tell the message of Christ's resurrection. We are to go where we are sent—whether it is our place of work, where we have fun, where we hang out with others to tell others of Jesus. For we are sent by Christ to tell this amazing story and share his powerful words.

What happens when we say, "May the peace of Christ be with you?" Even as we greeted each other this morning- I saw amazing things—smiles where there was none, hugs and kisses for those whom we know and hold dear. Laughter and joy= pure joy as you meet each other because Christ's Spirit is being shared. No we didn't go and breathe on each other talking like Darth Vader, but we did share in that Spirit. This is the powerful message that Jesus shared only after his resurrection with his disciples. Peace be with you.

But what is this joyful song? It is 'song' melody that rings in your heart because Jesus is there too! It is the song of joy because of the peace you have received from Christ Jesus because you have been forgiven. One leads to another.. forgiveness, peace and joy.

All of these were made possible through Jesus' death and resurrection. But you must not doubt that Jesus did not rise from death. You must believe that Jesus is with us now as the Spirit is present here and calling us to open our hearts and to fill them with joy.

In times and in special moments, you will also be overjoyed—because the Spirit of Christ will move to you laugh, sing and have the Joy, joy, joy,,, down in your heart forever. Be joyful Christ is alive. You will walk in the light because you believe. Remember always Jesus' Powerful Message, "Peace be with you" which will lead to your joyful song to sing because you have been forgiven and are free to live again.

"May Christ's peace be with you—may you sing Christ's joyful song" forevermore. Amen.