

a quadriplegic, paralyzed from the neck down. Someone like Joni demonstrates in living colour the injustice of the world – the need for not only a saviour but for resurrection.

While she was still trying to come to terms with this horrific accident, she would go to church in her wheelchair. The problem with being in a wheelchair, she found, was that at a certain point in her church's service every Sunday, the priest called everyone to kneel - which drove home to her the fact that she was stuck in a wheelchair.

Once she was at a youth convention in which the speaker urged the young people to get down on their knees and pray. Every single person did, except for Joni. "With everyone kneeling, I certainly stood out," she remembered. "And I couldn't stop the tears. But it wasn't because of self-pity. I was crying because the sight of hundreds of people on their knees before God was so beautiful – a picture of heaven."

"Sitting there, I was reminded that in heaven I will be free to jump, dance, kick, and do gymnastics. And...sometime before the guests are called to the banquet table at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, the first thing I plan to do on resurrected legs is to drop on grateful glorified knees. I will kneel at the feet of Jesus."

"I, with shriveled, bent fingers, atrophied muscles, gnarled knees, and no feeling from the shoulders down, will one day have a new body, light, bright and clothed in righteousness – powerful and dazzling.

Friends, today we have gathered to celebrate the Good News of Easter. It's an exciting Sunday – the music has stirred us, the scriptures have inspired us, the feeling of community and togetherness has

been good for our souls.

But now I have to ask you, how does it's truths affect you? I've talked about what it means on a big scale. This world isn't it, The injustice doesn't get the last word and salvation is now open to all.

But now you've got to decide. What does this event mean to you? You know the strange thing is that the disciples didn't get it. They experienced resurrection – what did they do next? The scripture says the next thing they did was they "went back to where they were staying." They went back to hiding out in fear, too afraid to live into their resurrection hope.

Today we have experienced the resurrection event once again through the living Word of God. What will you do next? Where will you go? How will you live?

The scripture says, "Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!"

Mary gets it right. To live as followers of Jesus in our time is to be people who know what happened on that Easter Sunday so long ago and who dare to live into its truths.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

## ***"Is Everything Sad Going to Come Untrue?"***

*March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024 — Selby United Church – Scripture: John 20:1-10*

*By Rev. Mike Putnam*

Imagine how Mary Magdalene must have felt as she made her way to the tomb in the dark of the early morning. Imagine how her weary mind must have darted from one heart wrenching thought to another. Everything they thought was true because of Jesus had turned out to be untrue. What now? What's left to hope for? How foolish she must have felt. How desperate things must have seemed.

Imagine the surge of adrenaline Peter and the other disciple must have felt when Mary came running in to tell them that the body was gone. They must have felt so confused, angry...sorrowful. Imagine how their minds must have moved from one scenario to another as they ran as fast as they could to the last place Jesus' body was last seen.

But it's interesting that neither Mary Magdalene nor Peter or the other disciple thought that resurrection was the most logical explanation. Mary thinks a gardener has moved the body. Peter probably assumes grave robbers have done their work. It's just more bad news in a week that just keeps getting worse and worse.

But it's Peter who puts it all together. He sees the grave clothes lying there and then he remembers. He remembers what Jesus had said so many times. "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise" (Mark 9:30). It made no sense back then...but now it's true.

On Easter morning there wasn't a single follower of Jesus left in the world. On

Easter morning Christianity was dead and entombed. And then Peter "Saw and believed." And then Mary had an encounter with the risen Lord himself.

And just like that a tiny spark began to burn and the movement of Jesus began again. The revolution that changed the world for good was set in motion. A whole new way of being and believing started to take hold and the world would never be the same.

The resurrection event is the be-all and the end-all of the Christian faith. If it's not true we are wasting our time this morning. The Apostle Paul once said, "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith."

There has always been a movement within the church to speak of resurrection as a kind of metaphor or a symbol. The hope, I suppose, is that makes it more palatable or reasonable.

Resurrection is just a butterfly coming out of its cocoon some have said. It's just springtime and new life. It's just the cycle of life doing what the cycle of life always does. You don't have to believe in miracles or even in God – it's just the celebration of nature doing what nature always does.

But that's not Easter. Springtime is great, don't get me wrong. It's amazing actually. Who doesn't like to watch the crocuses burst through the icy earth with sweet beauty. But that's just not what Easter is. It's not just the predictable rotation of the earth on its axis around the sun. No, Easter is the intervention of God, to do for us what we can not do for ourselves.

Easter is the powerful hand of God defeating the biggest unsolvable problems the world has. It's God saying to you that death does not get the last word, sin is not just an inevitability, and sorrow won't always be this way.

J.R.R. Tolkien, in his Lord of the Rings trilogy beautifully articulates the Easter realization. Sam Gamgee, having lost all hope encounters Gandalf the great wizard alive. "Gandalf!" he exclaims, "I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself. Is everything sad going to come untrue? What's happened to the world?" Gandalf replies, "A great shadow has departed," and then he laughed, and the sound was like music, or like water in a parched land; and as he listened the thought came to Sam that he had not heard laughter, the pure sound of merriment, for days upon days without count."

This is Tolkien's version of Easter. Laughter in the face of death. Joy in the face of defeat. The supernatural reversal of all that is hopeless and lost.

But you see, if Jesus is not raised from the dead then Christianity is a fraud and a joke. At best it's a placebo – a little sugar pill to help you get by.

What if the disciples just had a kind of spiritual experience where Jesus' memory lived on in their hearts in such a wonderful way that they spoke about him as if he was alive – well, then I don't really have much to say to you today. Springtime is lovely! But if Jesus rose from the dead (the first fruits of all who have died) then he is who he said he was. And He deserves to be at the very centre of your life.

And so, this day compels us to make that decision. Will I keep on living as if Springtime is the best news I've got? Or will I be transformed in the light of Easter? Will I be an Easter kind of person? Will I put my

hope in the power of God to undo all that is sad in the world by way of resurrection?

Well, you might ask what difference will it make? What happens when followers of Jesus become people set in motion by the Easter reality?

I want you to consider just three great truths that follow from the resurrection. There are so many more but for today these three will give you more than enough food for thought.

And the first is this: This world is not it. Now, don't get me wrong, this world is not bad. I'm not advocating Platonism or dualism, or transcendentalism or any other big fancy words about how we can move beyond the suffering of the world and find our true selves apart from it. What I am saying is that "being" is not just this.

The idea that "Life is short and then you die" leads to a certain way of living that makes sense if this is all there is. But Christians have always been able to live lovely, self-sacrificing, transformative, peaceful lives because of what we believe about resurrection.

What if this world is not all there is? What if there is a dimension of reality that transcends this one. What if that reality is breaking into our reality? Because that's what Jesus says. He says there is a place of supreme goodness and beauty. And its seed is already here – and because of Easter it's planted in your heart.

Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we've been given a glimpse of this reality that is beyond reality. And we get to live in anticipation of it every single day of our lives.

The second great truth of resurrection is this: The tyrants know that their time has come. The cross was Rome's tool for bringing the world into submission. There were times in the Roman Empire

when the crosses lined whole roads and you would walk between the thousands of crosses on your way to wherever you were going. Rome used the fear of death to get what it wanted in the world.

But Jesus' resurrection clearly showed that God gets the last word. God through Jesus took the worst that the world could throw at him – the world's slanted version of justice did its work. But God's love is way more powerful than the most powerful structures and systems our world has at its disposal.

Resurrection is the way that God corrects the worst the world can come up with. Have you ever been the victim of injustice? I don't mean a little perceived unfairness I mean real soul crushing injustice. So many have. But what are you going to do? You can't fight city hall. And even our best attempts at restitution and punishment never leaves anyone feeling satisfied. But that's why God says, "Vengeance is mine." Because he has a tool in his toolbox we can't even dream of.

Resurrection is God's answer to those times and places when injustice seems to win. And Easter people live in light of an Easter hope and we know the tyrants don't get the last word.

The third great truth of the resurrection is that the path to salvation has been opened to all. Paul says to the church in Philippi, "[Jesus], being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, rather he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself by being obedient to death – even death on a cross!"

Why did he do that? Why did Jesus make himself into the lowest of the low? Jesus went all the way down. Jesus gets

treated by the world like a common criminal. Why does he do this? He goes all the way down so that he can lift everyone else up. There is no one on earth lower than Jesus on Good Friday. "He descended into Hell" says the great creed of our faith.

Why did he do it? So that no one is left down. Everyone can be saved. Religion has always made distinctions about who is worthy and who is unworthy. There's delineations based on gender, ethnicity, sex, geography, wealth, status or whatever. But none of that is relevant here. This is probably the only place on earth where all of those identity markers that we hold up as so important are worth nothing.

Who you are or who you think you are is not that important here. Because here, our identity is that we're all sinners in need of grace.

We live in a culture that prides itself on inclusivity. We congratulate ourselves on how open minded we are and how we don't even see differences. But our cultures inclusivity ends up just breeding more exclusivity. We're inclusive of everyone who thinks and acts like us. But that's no inclusivity at all.

But what happens through resurrection is so much more effective than any human attempts. Because it's not based on pride, it's based on humility. Paul writes, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." You can't boast in light of that news.

So those are three things that are true only because of Easter. This world is not it, the tyrants time has come, and salvation is open to all.

Timothy Keller once recalled that every Easter he thinks about Joni Eareckson Tada. She was in an accident when she was just seventeen, and ever since she has been