

“Inside Joy”

March 27, 2016

From the Inside Out series

Hazel is mom to my friend, Jenn. At just under five feet tall, four feet and eleven inches to be exact, Hazel is small, but her personality makes up for it. She is fun and funny. And for as long as I’ve known her - over 25 years - she has always - always - worn high heels! And I have the highest heels I own on today!

It was a few years ago that Hazel was in a very serious car accident, and I met Jenn and her family in the ICU. Hazel recovered slowly and got back in her high heels. Since then, she’s battled cancer twice - most recently colon cancer. This week, Jenn sent a picture of Hazel shooting a basketball with Jenn’s dad looking on. Part of the caption read: “And here’s the woman who had colon surgery less than 3 weeks ago.” I couldn’t help but smile at the joy I saw.

That image was powerful - a blessing and reminder of the ways that we experience joy that comes from resurrection and new life. And I held that image up against Luke’s account of the resurrection. It’s my favorite of all the Gospel accounts, in case you wondered. And here’s why: *“But they did not believe the women because their words seemed to them an idle tale.”* Did you catch that? I’m not trying to get into gender wars today, but I hope you heard it. The women share wonderful news with the disciples of Jesus, and we’re told that these men dismissed it. One translation says it seemed like nonsense – like gossip, babbling, nothing worth paying attention to.

Even though these women had stayed with Jesus, even though they hadn’t taken their eyes off of him when he was killed, even though they had witnessed everything, the men don’t believe them! But then again, the reality of what happened had taken the women by surprise, too. There was silence, disbelief, confusion, and questions before they went back to tell anyone.

Those who had followed Jesus experienced a range of emotions – from the pageantry of Jesus coming into Jerusalem to shouts of “Hosanna!” to the intimacy of Jesus washing his disciples’ feet and sharing the Last Supper with them to the terror of his crucifixion. How hard it must have been for the women to hear that he had risen! And how hard for the others to believe them!

Maybe it seems strange today – like those women who wanted to get to the tomb and prepare Jesus’ body, who wanted to see Jesus – that they couldn’t find him. Instead, the two men ask, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!”

The women were looking for Jesus in the wrong place – the tomb is empty. But it isn't just the empty tomb that leads them to faith. They will meet the risen Christ face-to-face, personally. There will be no doubt that he is alive.

Simply hearing that the tomb is empty doesn't make us believe that Jesus is raised from the dead and that he lives. That's not what brings us here to worship today. We have to experience the risen Christ for ourselves so that we might believe in him and claim the new life he offers so freely for each of us.

The men at the tomb proclaim it: "He is not here; he has risen!" Resurrection isn't what anyone expected to happen, and sometimes it's hard for us to believe, too. The risen Christ will meet people in unexpected places – and still we meet Jesus in those places we'd never guess we would – when a woman who had cancer surgery three weeks ago picks up a basketball and makes a shot on a sunny day. That was one place I saw the power of joy and new life.

Where have you seen it? Maybe you've had a moment of joy – even that quick glimpse of joy that feeds our souls. Or maybe it was when you cried with someone who is grieving, when you came to worship and heard just the right music, when you shared a meal with loved ones. Maybe you'll feel joy when we touch the water and remember that we're precious to God. Maybe it's when we celebrate a blessing or when something holy happens – those small moments when we know that God's love is real.

Images of resurrection are all around us. For me, this week, Hazel shooting a basketball was a sign of resurrection, of new life, of joy. In her, I saw God's desire for new life for all of us.

That's the thing about resurrection – we know it when we see it. We know it when we hear it. We know it when we experience it. And then we're sent out to share it. It is not an idle tale; it is not nonsense. God offers joy and new life. We witness the power of resurrection and new life when we speak of a God who loves, saves, and sets us free.

So it's good to hear the words from the two men at the tomb: "Remember how he told you..." Remember what Jesus did and said. Remember the time you spent with him. Remember the miracles. Remember his teaching. Remember how he changed your life.

Has it been a long time since you remembered what Jesus means to your life? Has it been too long? It's easy for us to remember bad experiences we've had. We're not so great at dwelling on the good things from our past – the spiritual highs that we've had, the moments when we felt Jesus' love for us so powerfully that it touched our

hearts and we were never the same again. Is any of that an idle tale - nonsense? Absolutely not! That's the power of new life and hope – joy – in our lives!

If we've experienced anything good from Jesus Christ, then we have the charge to go and share it – even if others think it's nonsense, even if people might dismiss it as an idle tale. Just like these women, we have to take courage and go and tell the others that Jesus is alive and can make a difference because of what he's done for us.

Jesus isn't a dead hero, but a living Savior right now. He is the One sent from God who meets us and offers us new life right now. Jesus isn't just a perfect example for us to follow. He is much more than that. He is the One who shows us how to live and gives us strength to be faithful – to love more deeply, to reach out to those in need, to change our lives – right now. He is Savior.

Our faith isn't nonsense. Death doesn't have to be the end for us because Jesus lives. Just like the women who went to the tomb prepared to find Jesus' body and prepare it for burial, but instead found the potential for joy, we experience joy today because of God's grace at work in resurrection. The reality of resurrection is unexpected. Resurrection is a way that God shows love to us and calls us to live with joy.

God's love is more powerful than the worst of what we experience in the world, and God loves us no matter what. That's not nonsense – it's new life and Good News! We have to decide if we'll share it like the women did.

What they experienced at the empty tomb was only a beginning of life lived with Jesus who is risen from the dead. And, friends, for you and me, Easter isn't an end to our faith. It's the beginning. This isn't a one day celebration, but a way that we live every day with joy, hope, and peace.

So will we go from here and live as people who know Good News? Are you willing to go from here and be an example of resurrection joy in the world? Friends, God needs us to share joy because God knows, we need it!

The nail and tag remind us that the cross is not the end. We have the best news to share - that we don't live under the fear of sin and death. Jesus is God's message to the world that death isn't the end. And now we can share that good news and work for God's kingdom here and now!

So, let's try it again: Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed!**

That's good news - joyous news - enough to share!

Thanks be to God. AMEN.