

“With Glad Hearts”

April 26, 2020

Heart of the Matter series – 3rd Sunday of Easter – Livestream

With glad hearts... Having a glad heart is a challenge sometimes, isn't it? And it may feel strange to live in this season of Easter, a season of celebration, in the midst of these difficult times. Our Jewish friends celebrated Passover as we were walking through Holy Week, and Passover ended just after Easter. This week, our Muslim friends entered the holy month of Ramadan, which includes daily fasting and a special focus on prayer and giving to charity. Three major world religions have observed or are observing major holidays as we all experience a global pandemic.

And the heart has quickly become a symbol of solidarity and hope around the world. Hearts taped and painted on windows for healthcare workers and for so many who are working and serving on the frontlines in hospitals, grocery stores, civil service agencies, police and fire departments, and so many places. Hearts are all around us, and Scripture is full of heart references.

So during this season, we'll focus on our hearts. We talk about heart health a lot – physical health for the organ that pumps blood through our bodies. I've been paying more attention to my heart rate as I get my steps in each day. I've had those moments when my heart literally feels heavy with grief, worry, and fear.

When we talk about our spiritual lives, the heart is the place of motivation – why we do what we do – that part of us that God changes and makes new. The heart is where God's truth rests in us and lives in us. The heart is the center of our spiritual lives.

We hear it in Psalm 16: “Therefore **my heart is glad** and my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure. You, O Lord, show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy. In your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

I know those words well because I share them at nearly every funeral or memorial service. The whole psalm tells the whole story – from uncertain times of life to the trust we have in God and the security we feel in God's care. There's a “quiet joy” – honesty about the hard times of life and God's presence in the midst of them.

We keep reminding ourselves that Easter is a season – not a day. It's easy to forget that after the “Alleluia” fades and the lilies wilt a little. As we're sheltering in place (and sheltering with faith and hope and love, too), we remember that the Good News of Easter – the promise of resurrection and God's power to overcome even death – is the root of who we are together even as we're separated. It's a “heart message” for us – a motivation for living with hope that God is at work, and God will not ever stop working to bring hope.

When we celebrated Easter two weeks ago, we heard from John's Gospel about Jesus returning to his disciples: "It was still the first day of the week. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you.""

And then again, "After eight days his disciples were again in a house and Thomas was with them. Even though the doors were locked, Jesus entered and stood among them. He said, "Peace be with you." The first thing Jesus says is "Peace." It's not just a word or a greeting, but even more a promise after the time of uncertainty they've experienced.

I can only imagine that the disciples' hearts weren't at peace at all! They had seen everything go so wrong in such short time. They were dealing with grief, regret, fear, and lots of emotions. Jesus' proclamation of "peace" is a powerful word to people who were scared and unsure about their future.

It's easy to forget that resurrection is the foundation of our faith in Jesus Christ. We believe that death isn't the final word, but that God offers us faith, hope, and love that last forever. Just like Peter, we place our hope in the truth that Jesus' death on the cross wasn't the end, but that he was raised from the dead because of God's great love for us.

Peter preaches this first sermon in the Book of Acts on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came through the city of Jerusalem when Jews were gathered from all over to celebrate a festival – thousands of people together. And just as Jesus promised when he ascended into heaven, the Spirit empowers Peter to share Good News: Jesus wasn't simply resuscitated (revived only to die a mortal death), but he was resurrected (he was alive forever).

Sometimes the best sermons are the ones that we preachers preach to ourselves, and I wonder if that's what Peter was doing – preaching to himself and being convicted of this incredible resurrection reality. I imagine it took some getting used to, but we know that he was empowered by the Spirit to share Good News.

And we're challenged by Peter's words. Even though we aren't direct witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus, we love him and trust in him – and we claim a deep joy and peace that doesn't waver even when we face – death, grief, illness, brokenness, pain, despair. We've seen that witness in these days through prayer, painted rocks on doorsteps, masks made with love, caring acts, and loving words.

And Peter is a great example of the power of God to change a heart. Remember that Peter denied Jesus even after he was so certain that he'd be faithful to the end. What a story! To go from fearful to faithful – even becoming a leader in the early church! Peter is a reminder that God brings new hope when we don't see any

possibilities left! Peter goes from someone who runs away from truth to someone who acts on truth, who witnesses to the truth of resurrection, and ultimately loses his life for truth.

Peter calls us to be “Easter people,” believing that the tomb is not an end, but is a beginning. Some even say that the tomb is a womb from where new life comes! It made me think of a song that was shared at Marilyn Colburn’s memorial service last year:

Ev'ry morning is Easter morning

From now on

Ev'ry day's resurrection day

The past is over and gone

Goodbye guilt, goodbye fear

Good riddance

Hello Lord, hello sun

I am one of the Easter people

My new life has begun!

Easter is a way of life that reminds us that we’re loved beyond all endings, that there’s nothing to fear because perfect love from God casts out fear, and that Jesus comes to offer peace even in the most difficult times. We can live with glad hearts – not ignoring or downplaying the challenges we face, but trusting in God brings hope.

That promise changes who we are at the core – in our hearts. Peter speaks to this crowd as a witness. Jesus is more than just a man he spent lots of time with. God is more than a name. Something has changed. Peter’s heart is changed by the Gospel – this Good News that Jesus isn’t simply a man, but Lord and Savior – the Messiah promised from God.

And we know the power of his witness because thousands of people who listened that day responded. They accepted Christ and started a community of believers right where they were. They spent time together in worship, ate together with **glad and generous hearts**. They were a witness to the power of God together, and so are we.

With glad hearts...hearts that are changed by the Good News of God’s great love that never ends. With glad hearts...our witness to the world of the hope of the risen Christ, alive and at work in us through the power of the Holy Spirit. May we live with glad hearts.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

SHARING THE PEACE OF CHRIST

Jesus wanted the disciples offered the disciples two things in their moment of fear: peace and the Holy Spirit. We can experience those gifts as we take a breath, as we pause and “take a breather” and remember that feel Jesus’ spirit is living in us.

I invite you to **share the peace of Christ** – that peace that Jesus offered first when he came back to his disciples and showed them that he was alive. Whether you are with others in your home or alone – Christ’s love and peace abide with us. Consider the ways you experience the peace of Christ – when and where do you see it and feel it?

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE & THE LORD’S PRAYER