

Easter Sunday

Luke 24:1-12

So far as we know, there has only been one day in the last 2,000 years when literally not one person in the world believed Jesus was alive.¹

On Saturday morning after Jesus' crucifixion,
the disciples wake up after not having slept for two days.
The people who were screaming for blood the day before were quiet.
The crowds have gone home.
Jesus is dead.

It's not Sunday. It's not Friday. But Saturday.
It's like the day after a prayer gets prayed, but there is no answer.
It's like the day after a soul gets crushed, but there is no promise of healing.

It's a strange day. An in-between day.
In between despair and joy. In between darkness and light.

Have you ever been there?
Have you ever experienced a time when you prayed, but there was no answer?
Have you ever been crushed by life...
 by the loss of a job, or a business,
 by the news from your doctor that you or a loved one has cancer...
 or by the news that your husband or wife wants a divorce?
Those days are like the Friday, Jesus was crucified.
Friday was a nightmare day... a day filled with agonizing pain and terror.

On Saturday, the disciples wake up and the terror is past, at least for the moment.
They are numb.
They feel empty and drained of life.
Those who believe in Jesus gather quietly.
They remember the things he said.
What he taught.
The things he did. The people he touched and healed.
They remember what it felt like when Jesus smiled at them.
They remember their hopes and dreams.

But now it is Saturday.
None of them wants to say it, but in their hearts,
they are trying to come to grips with the dreaded thought that Jesus failed.

Have you ever experienced that kind of doubt?
On the Saturdays of your life... have you ever wondered if Jesus is real?
Have you ever wondered if what the Bible says is really true?
Did Jesus really rise from the dead?

Saturday in Jerusalem, Jesus disciples woke up.
They were still alive.
They would have to go on. But they didn't know how.
Their hopes and their dreams had died.

The Bible proclaims to us that on the Third Day Jesus rose from the dead.

But on that in-between day, on Saturday...when you can't see the future...
as far as you know, rescue and healing may never come.
You wonder if it might be Saturday, the rest of your life.

On Friday, when the devastating news hits us...we call out to God
"O God, listen to me...save me from this trial...
Do something God... Say something...and we wait."

There's an old sermon that speaks of that first Saturday after Jesus crucifixion.
The preacher asks, "What happened on Saturday?"
And he answers: "There was a great silence - a great silence and stillness.
A great silence because the King sleeps.
God has died in the flesh, and hell trembles with fear.
He has gone to search for our first parents as for a lost sheep."

The Apostles Creed teaches us that Jesus descended into hell.
Somehow no suffering you go through,
is suffering that Jesus will not endure to save you.

Think about that.
There is no limit to what Jesus was willing to do, to save us.
If Jesus would go to the cross, and the grave,
and even the depths of hell... to save one lost sheep,
where else would Jesus go?

Would he even enter the Saturdays of our lives?
Would Jesus show up when we are devastated by the death of a loved one?
Or by losing a job, or suffering an addiction or illness, or personal failure?
Is there life after death...healing after loss? Hope after despair?
That's a Saturday question.

But today is Easter.
And here is the Easter prayer I've been praying for you every day since I started as your pastor.
Every day I have prayed:
... that God will strengthen you
no matter what you are going through
... that God will strengthen you through the power of the Holy Spirit.
And that Jesus ... risen from the dead...our living Lord,
will dwell in your heart though faith.

Whatever struggle or challenge you may be going through...large or small..
remember, God is the God, who rolled away the stone.
And Jesus stepped out of that tomb... and into your life.

Early on that first Easter morning,
the women came to the tomb... still numb and in despair...
still... reliving their Saturday questions.
But the stone was rolled away...
and when they went in... two angels declared to them,
"Why do you look for the living, among the dead?"
Jesus is not here, He has risen!

We all need people in our lives who can remind us of that truth

Let me share a story about people like that.

On a sweltering summer night in New Orleans, sixteen recovering alcoholics gather for their weekly AA mtg. Although several members attend other meetings during the week this is their home group. They have been meeting on Tuesday nights for several years and know each other well. Some talk to each other daily on the telephone; others socialize outside of meetings. The personal investment in one another's sobriety is sizeable.

Nobody fools anybody else.

Everyone is there because he or she made a slobbering mess of his or her life and is trying to put the pieces back together. Each meeting is marked by levity and seriousness. Some members are wealthy, others middle class or poor. Some smoke, others don't. Most drink coffee. Some have graduate degrees; others have not finished high school.

For one small hour, the high and mighty descend and the lowly rise.

The result is fellowship.

The meeting opened with the Serenity Prayer, followed by a moment of silence. The prologue from Alcoholics Anonymous was read from the Big Book, by Harry. followed by the Twelve Steps of the program, by Michelle.

That night, Jack was the appointed leader. "The theme I would like to talk about tonight is gratitude," he began, "but if anyone wants to talk about something else, let's hear it."

Immediately, Phil's hand shot up.

"As you all know, last week I went up to Pennsylvania to visit family and missed the meeting. You also know I have been sober for seven years. Last Monday I got drunk and stayed drunk for five days."

The only sound in the room was the drip of the Coffee maker.

"You all know the buzz word, H.A.L.T. in this program, he continued.

"Don't let yourself get hungry, angry, lonely, or tired, or you will be every vulnerable for the first drink.

The last three got to me, I unplugged the jug and..."

Phil's voice choked and he lowered his head.

I glanced around the table – moist eyes, tears of compassion, soft sobbing, were the only sound in the room.

"The same thing happened to me, Phil, but I stayed drunk for a year.'

"Thank God you are back" said another.

"Boy that took a lot of guts."

"Relapse spells relief Phil," said a substance abuse counselor

"Let's get together tomorrow and figure out what you needed relief from and why.'

"I'm so proud of you" said Bill.

"Heck, I never made it even close to seven years."

As the meeting ended, Phil stood up.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, another on his face.

Then kisses on his eyes, forehead, neck, and cheek.

“You old ragamuffin,” said Denise. “Let’s go, I’m treating you to a banana split.”²

Dear friends in Christ...

that’s what it means to be an Easter people, reaching out with compassion to someone how is hurting.

We all know someone who is hurting.

It may be someone in our own family, or a friend, or a co-worker.

That’s what I’d love for Community Lutheran to be known for in this community. Reaching out with compassion to those who are hurting.

So that they know us... not for our programs or facilities...

but they know us for the way we love one another.

When we are facing the tombs of our lives....

God rolls away the stone and sends us a messenger to say:

“Why do you look for the living, among the dead?

“Jesus is not here. He has risen.”

Saturday is gone. Easter is here! Jesus is here!

You are forgiven... you are loved... you are healed!

May the hope of the Risen Christ... dwell in your heart through faith.

And by the power of the Holy Spirit...

may you know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,

and may you be filled with all the fullness of God.³ Amen.

¹ Inspired and indebted to a theme and the writing of John Ortberg

² story by Brennan Manning in *The Ragamuffin Gospel* pp. 66-68.

³ Eph. 3:17,19