

Easter/4th Virtual Worship in the time of Covid19

Life Goes On

Matthew 28:1-8

Linda and I spent a couple of afternoons this week riding our bikes around town, visiting with members and families. It was so good to see each other (from six feet apart)! I must, however, report one glitch. We arrived at Fred and Nancy Rubey's at exactly the same time as their lawn mowing service. Fred had thoughtfully placed lawn chairs in their driveway, squared away at the prescribed measurement to maintain social distancing. So there we sat, yelling at each other to be heard above the lawn mowing tractor and the gasoline engine-powered trimmer. We laughed about having to repeat every other sentence.

The metaphor of this experience fits Easter in the time of Covid 19 perfectly. We were just trying to be the church, trying to have a little Christian fellowship. We were also trying to be good citizens, to obey the guidelines our political leaders have given us as we fight this virus together. And here came this barrier, this obstacle. Yet we persevered through the challenge of communicating over the noise. Eventually the workers moved off to do another lawn and we finished our visit with a lot less difficulty. Honestly, though potentially deadly and terribly disruptive to our way of life, Covid 19 does not seem likely to threaten us forever. By following the rules, we will beat it. We will be able to hug each other. The stock market will stop gyrating. Churches will worship together. Imagine the laughter at Fellowship Time!

Jesus died on Good Friday. As Presbyterian minister and author Fred Beuchner put it, he died twice. First he died emotionally from the betrayal of not only Judas, but in a smaller way of Peter and all the disciples. And he died a physically excruciating death on the cross. (We observe again that excruciating and cross come from the same Latin root, which means “intense, prolonged pain”.) But less than 48 hours later he walked out of his tomb. This Easter, we celebrate his resurrection in the midst of the toughest times most of us have experienced. That ought to make our joyous laughter when we come out of the shadows all the louder.

This is about the 30th Easter sermon I have written and preached. I believe that for all of the previous 29 or so I have faithfully exegeted the Gospel passages on which I have spoken. That is, I have shared an analysis of the scripture and then based my sermon on it. Today I feel called instead to tell the story of contemporary life in the context of Christ's passion and resurrection. I believe even the youngest watching this video know the story well enough to gain from this sermon what I hope to supply. And here is what I hope to supply: perspective and hope.

One of the women who stood beside Linda as a bridesmaid nearly 39 years ago has contracted and survived Covid 19. One member of this congregation has lost two members of his extended family. As of this writing (the numbers of course will grow higher by the time you watch this), the novel corona virus has killed 245 Hoosiers. And the threat feels even greater than mere numbers can convey. For the numerous math and economics teachers in this church I apologize for saying “mere numbers”.

Wait...no I don't! Because the threat **does** feel greater than the numbers. We cannot see this enemy with our naked eyes. It makes us suspicious of anybody who coughs or sneezes. Really smart, dedicated people cannot tell us exactly what it will do to public health and the economy. Every single one of us wonders whether we will catch it, and if we do, how hard would it hit us?

Yet for perspective, let us remind ourselves of a few historical facts. One hundred years ago, between 50 and 100 million people world-wide died from the Spanish Flu. It killed about fifteen percent of all who caught it. It killed about four percent of the entire human population of Planet Earth. Medical knowledge at the time knew less about how it operated or what to do to fight it than we currently know about Covid 19. Going back a few hundred years more the Plague ravaged Europe, Asia and Africa, killing even higher proportions of humanity. Here in America over 4,000 men died in less than one hour during the Civil War battle of the Crater at Petersburg, Virginia. Death has stalked us in the past with greater efficiency than it does now.

Obligatory disclaimer: every person who dies leaves behind at least one mourner. Furthermore, each person who contracts Covid 19 suffers physically, emotionally and perhaps spiritually. But we as a species have faced much harder challenges. And we as Christians know the trajectory of Jesus' life. We know that the pain and the fear passed for him. They do for us as well when we trust in him. Easter represents the triumph of light over darkness, health over pain, life over death. The miracle of Easter is the promise that we receive all these gifts through our faith in the

One who accomplished the victory.

Look, practically every preacher in all the world will preach a variation of this same message I'm offering. You probably could have written it yourself. But its power and truth do not diminish with its predictability. So let us break out of our gloom and doom—no matter how well founded they may be—for at least this Easter day. Let us pause to ponder the love of the man Jesus, who died for us. Let us shout hallelujah to our God, who rose from the dead. Let us smile and sing and give one another virtual, officially approved embraces. Jesus Christ died. He rose from the dead. He offers life with himself, life abundant here and now, and eternal life with him, to those who believe in him. Hallelujah! He is risen! He is risen indeed!