

Sermon I Corinthians 13 Matthew 28:1-20 March 23, 2008
Living Christ Ways - The Fruits of Faithfulness -
Love - Limitless Power for Life

Opening

I am not quite sure how to greet you this morning - Happy Easter or Merry Christmas. The weather seems confused about which season its supposed to be. But either way I'm pleased you're here and I greet you in Christ's name - the babe of Bethlehem, and the Risen Lord of Life.

And I do invite you to join at the end of our worship in helping to sing, or in standing to hear, the Hallelujah Chorus - which celebrates both Christ's birth and his new birth and ours in resurrection. Christ is Risen - help us sing praise this Easter Day There is a red friendship.....

Sermon

Two short phrases help capture for me the deepest meaning of this Holy Week - this celebration that is at the heart of the Christian faith and my faith. God is Good, All the Time. And - Christ is Risen. He is Risen Indeed. And, this Holy Week, two simple, special, personal experiences helped fix those words more deeply in my mind and heart and soul.

Late on Maundy Thursday night, after our worship here, I walked the Labyrinth in Heritage Hall. A physical expression of the inward and outward journey of our lives, of our faith, and our finding God, finding God present in the world around us, but also at work deep within us - in our minds and hearts and souls.

At the end of the Labyrinth walk I looked up and saw the Tapestry on the wall - In Heritage Hall - and I saw - really saw for the first time I think - in the center - the picture of a lamb. And - almost - bam - the message echoed in my inner ear Jesus Christ, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.. Easter - God's Grace confirmed - God's love - a greater power than sin and death. Yes.

And - another special experience of this season, To be here - in this place - very late - in the dark, and lonely, almost frightening quiet - with strange night sounds in the silence. And then - to notice it - you can't help but notice it. The lovely scent of the lilies - filling this room, and the hallway...

And even in the dark night, in this empty Church, the promise of this morning, this Easter morning, penetrates the night. The promise would not be denied by the dark, even as night cannot hold back the day. And I pray, that what has been true in a very strange way for me, might be true in some wonder - full way for you today. Some more powerful sense of God's presence in your life.

That the fragrance, the bloom, the soul penetrating promise of Easter may reach and touch every dark place in your life - every fear or dread or sorrow - and leave you with the certain sure and lovely hope of Easter - He is not dead, He is Risen. Against the morn, unmaimed, new born, the living Truth shall rise, this day - anew - for you and for us all.

Please pray with me....

Lord, Risen Lord, be raised again, in our hearts, that not the darkness of the world, not defeats or disappointments in our lives, not death, but the strong sure surging joyous hope of Easter and your endless love for us, will mark our lives, this day, now and forever. Amen.

Lloyd Olgilvie, former Senate Chaplain, tells the story of a freshman away at college - who showed clear signs of that common freshman malady called - home sickness. He had that woebegon look - lost and lonely. And one kindly professor, feeling his pain, stopped him after class. He put his arm around the young man's shoulders and said - Young man, I wonder, are you perhaps a bit home sick? The young man turned, straightened himself, and said to the professor. No sir. I'm not homesick - but I've got a lot of here sickness.

Here sickness? Here sickness! How true! How true! Olgilvie felt it, I feel it. You do, too. A here sickness - here, in this saved but not yet finished creation of God. Here - still - with all the sadness and trouble and sorrow and sin we see here, feel here - in this world, in our lives. So many people, sick of mind and heart and soul and spirit ...and body.

The sins of greed and lust and hatred and selfishness - and foolishness, rage around us, and death shadows our days. And not all our efforts at a better life, a more love filled life, or, to shut our minds to the troubles, finally works. The darkness, the here-sickness, is still here.

And we need something, something, to break the spell, to loosen the grip, of such feelings. To remind us of our true home, and of our way from here to there. We need some faith, some sure and certain feeling about life, some confidence, that reaches beyond the here and now, that lifts away the here sickness.

We need what the followers of Jesus found - long ago - found in him, found in their faith in him, and found for sure, on Easter morn. They found a way through the here and now, and, a way home. What they found was the power of God's love reaching them, and its limitless power for life, for living life in a new way.

And that's how Paul described it - the Christian life - a better way. And that's how the people who knew the early Christians described them - as followers of the way. The way. A way - like a trail through the woods that we come across - leading us homeward...

That's what Paul was talking about with the Corinthians, and that's what Easter defines for us, and that's what the Christian faith is most centrally about - all about, about, a way - love's way to live.

Yes, sure, love can be just a word, too. We say it - sometimes with deep meaning. I love you. And there are no more lovely words, more comforting or pleasing words, if they are true, to win your heart and warm your world. In deed.

A work done, with care and compassion, and kindness, and patience. Paul talks about such deeds. We know about such deeds. through to us. Change us. But even more than a good word, or even good deeds, love, Christian love, is the way, a full way of living out beyond any "here" sickness.... And you've known the truth of all this –

The truth of Christ's words about the way of love, in your own lives... the truth of what happens when we truly seek to meet the needs of the least and last of God's children - If you've been on a mission trip - in the serving line at Ft. Street, helping here with hosting the homeless, volunteering for rebuilding together - serving in love's way, your own troubles fade away, lose their heaviness in your life, You feel energy you didn't know you had...

That's the power of love - of God's love – lived in Jesus life, loosed and set free in our lives – with the promise of Easter - that it is love that wins – that rules – that is God's gift to us and God's will for us...

The great good news of Easter, of the Resurrection, is,,, That the way, the great good way of Christ and his love, not only was, but is and will ever be. Is not only a way for us to live in the thru this world, but is the way to life eternal.

And the message was powerfully declared in the great open arms of Jesus Christ on the cross, the Christ who chose to go to the Cross, that his wide reaching love, for the world, and every sinner in the world, could not be denied. A love reaching wide, so wide, wide enough for every one, and for all time,

A love to take in all who need and want to be taken in. Jesus Christ's love and call are for us all - as we live thru the ups and downs of life's journey.

I have a picture, a slide, of a highway, a ribbon of road that reaches through the hills of northern Wisconsin. And in the picture, the road reaches out away from where I stood with the camera - going up and down and up and down, and on and on and on... It follows the shape of the land...

And it is an image for me, a powerful image, of the way of God's love for me, love so amazing so divine... God's love, in Christ, going on and on and on through the high moments and low times of my life, the victories and the defeats, the joys and the sorrows, the births and deaths, and going on for ever.

And I see this as the way of love in Christ...life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, making a clear way for me to follow ... Palm Sunday - and times of praise - Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, times of deep disappointment and loneliness and suffering... and death... And the Easter of new beginnings ... of ever new beginnings... even out beyond the strange event that we call death...

Love, God's love - limitless power for life.... Yes - life can just roll on, and, roll right over us.... Come and gone. Life goes on - even this Easter day. Golf tournaments, the March Madness of Basketball, Spring training, a war in Afghanistan and Iraq that will shatter lives this day - too many lives. The poor, more pained by the cold and snow of this week than we even know - disease and death ... this Easter day... Life goes on..

But beneath it all, over arching it all, deep within it all, we can sense, we can feel, we can see, we can know.. there is a way of life, love's way of life... going on.. A forgiving, patient, kind, life saving, life renewing, spirit of life... that nothing can deny or destroy

A way, love's way, that calls us to walk in it.... To live in it... to let it live through us... a way that promises all who seek to follow it, who will seek to make this way their way, It promises to lead us on and on in hope, lead us home , home again to God who loves us with a love that will never let us go... For - By God's great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ

Yes, Yes. For the heart that is open, for the eyes of faith that will see, there is love, God's long forever way of love, long before us, and long after us, and if we live and believe in that love, in the living Lord of that love, then our loving will never end, and our living will never end.

For Christ, the lord and savior of our lives, is risen. He is risen, indeed. And in him, and through him, we live and move and have our being. Forever and ever. Thanks be to God. Amen.

David W. Robertson, Pastor