

“These Words”

Valley Presbyterian Church – April 4, 2010

Easter Sunday

Isaiah 65:17-25

Rev. John Wahl

Luke 24:1-12

I was recounting this week the different ways over the years that I have attempted to explain the Easter story through children’s sermons. I have used the image of a bulb which transforms into a flower; how an egg produces the life of baby chick; the way a caterpillar creates a cocoon and emerges transformed as a butterfly. In each of these examples, a new and beautiful life comes – when the time is right – from what seems to our eyes to be lifeless. That is why we surround ourselves with these images on Easter: decorating our sanctuaries and homes with lilies; filling and hiding and searching for eggs containing small treasures; sharing stories about rising up and taking flight like a newly hatched butterfly testing its wings.

And so, it’s easy for us to believe that resurrection is as natural a thing as flowers poking through the thawed ground or eggs cracking open to reveal chicks or butterflies crawling out of cocoons. As beautiful as these images are, there is something deceptive about them; for there is nothing about the resurrection of Jesus that is natural.

The women who go to the tomb in this Easter morning account are faithful disciples who set out to anoint their deceased, beloved teacher. They were not expecting to do or to see anything incredible, they simply wished to serve; to give their honor and respect. They likely weren’t even sure they could get to see Jesus – enclosed in a tomb guarded by Roman soldiers. But, when they arrived, the stone was rolled away; the body was not there. The two messengers sitting inside the cave told them not to be afraid; it was not that something bad had happened to the man for whom they were looking – Jesus – but he had risen.

In writing his account of this Easter story, Luke uses this word “but” six times. By this word, he emphasizes that what has taken place is unexpected, incredible and unnatural. The expected, natural direction of events dramatically changes with that little word “but.” It shows that God isn’t through yet; that God hasn’t spoken the last word yet.

For many of us, that is the reason that we are here this morning, because we have the hope that God has not yet spoken the last word. Even if we didn’t consciously think of it this morning as we arose or got dressed, we need to believe

that Good Friday is not the end of the story; that death does not have the final word.

We listen to hear this Word of God to sustain us in the long nights of waiting and longing: in hospital beds and waiting rooms; when our kids are away and we can't be there to protect them; when our friends are struggling and we don't know how to help.

We listen to hear this Word of God to tell us that the story unfolding around us is not complete. And while we are listening, we offer our service like those women who were heading to the tomb that morning did. We hope that by being a faithful follower of Jesus; by keeping up with our duties and responsibilities – as humble and mundane as they may seem – God will change things in an unexpected and unnatural way. Easter reassures us with the story that God can and does say “yes” to new life for us and those around us.

This morning, we remember God's story by coming to the Lord's Table to be fed. This is a way of remembering the sacrifice of Jesus, but it is also a chance to experience the unnatural and the unexpected. It is one small way that we participate in the incredible story of the Resurrection; to provide witness today that the tomb is empty and that Jesus' story did not end on Good Friday. It is also an invitation to live as Jesus lived: unafraid of death; confident that the broken can be healed; and hopeful that Jesus is still living and intent on changing the world.

Over the past week, the earth has experienced an amazing awakening; with grass turning green, flowers blooming, and trees budding. This year, at least (but not always!), we have marched through a Holy Week with sun and warmth; spring has arrived with all of its splendor and glory; anticipating the story of hope reborn and life renewed.

What we have seen in the world around us is natural – it is incredible to witness, but still not unnatural. The Resurrection of Jesus is different; it offers us the hope that God goes beyond the natural to show us the love and mercy that is available to us. In the meal that is set before us, we get a foretaste of God's love, which will come to us fully in an amazingly unexpected way. These words that we hear today are not commonplace; they are our hope and our life. Thanks be to God for the gift of the risen One, Jesus Christ. AMEN.