

Rejoice in Salvation
Rev. Nicole Farley
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
April 5, 2015

Isaiah 25:6-9

⁶ On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear.
⁷ And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;
⁸ he will swallow up death forever.
Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the Lord has spoken.
⁹ It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.
This is the Lord for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

John 20:1-18

¹ Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.’ ³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. ⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹² and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.’ ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?’ Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.’ ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rabbouni!’ (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”’ ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Why are you weeping? The last time we came together Jesus had been killed – death brings a grief which lingers upon us. What other grief lingers upon us as we gather here this morning? Did you leave home in a rush, trying to get kids / spouses / family members out the door, maybe not feeling like your best self? Did you spend yesterday fighting with a friend or sitting at the bedside of a loved one? Did you wake in pain? Did you wake with worry in your heart and in your mind for yourself? For someone else? Is someone you care about in need of healing, in need of peace? Why are you weeping? Let's take a quiet moment to acknowledge before God what worries you, what causes you to weep. [pause] Though not exactly the same, maybe your troubles are reflected by Mary Magdalene, who lamented mournfully, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

On this Easter day, are you looking for something? Did you come here looking for something, not sure where it can be found? On this Easter day, I hope you came here for hope. Hope is what our readings offer, not in place of that which worries us but alongside all that worries us. Easter hope is not a magic wand which makes all the troubles disappear. Easter hope shows up and it makes that which troubles us not "all," not everything.

Because of / through the resurrection we trust that death has been defeated. We trust in what Paul wrote to the Romans: "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."¹ This is our Easter hope – all that stuff we brought with us when we came through the doors of the sanctuary? None of it is powerful enough, even combined, to keep God from us.

With nothing separating us from the God of life, the God who is life, we come to a different kind of life, what we call life eternal. In recognizing the reality of all that other stuff, Professor Alan G. Padgett writes "The gift of eternal life may begin now, but that in no way takes us out of suffering and death in this world."² The words of Isaiah give us, as Pastor Gordon Bryant Wirth describes, "assurance of God's promise intending that God's people would survive the painful struggle in the valley until they found their way to the joyful celebration on the mountain."³ On this mountain, God will destroy "the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever."

Only you know why you seek that mountaintop, why you have come looking for the Lord, looking for a savior like those earliest disciples. For them they hoped to be saved from the oppression of Roman rule, from poverty, from persecution, from life which was not abundant. Only you can define

¹ Romans 8:38-39.

² *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2*, p. 362.

³ *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2*, p. 361.

what oppresses you, how you feel poverty, how you are persecuted, where you feel lack in place of abundance. Only you know why you desire good news, why you need good news. Your need for good news is individual but the need for good news is universal. The good news for us all is that God has destroyed the shroud that is cast over **all** peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations. God has swallowed up death forever.

Mary Magdalene is the bearer of the good news to the disciples – flushed and breathless she nearly shouts “I have seen the Lord!” To those gathered, who could only yet say with confidence: “Christ has died” – not also “Christ has risen; Christ will come again” – Mary speaks to these sad and scared people. She is the first to share the gospel – in Greek, *euangelion*, literally “good news.” She embodies the tension to which Isaiah refers. Cynthia M. Campbell, former president of McCormick Theological Seminary, has written that “Isaiah invites us to reflect on how we live in ‘hopeful realism’: realistic about the reality of death in the world and our own fears of separation from those we love and from God, and hopeful, even deeply confident, that God will do what God has promised – namely, that God will be God for us forever.”⁴

God will be God for us forever. We humans have put God to death – we are the ones who said “Crucify him! Crucify him!” - and how does God respond? By bringing us even closer, by breaking down even the last barrier we tried to put between us and God. And so, we can have no doubt – instead we can be “deeply confident that God will do what God has promised...that God will be God for us forever.” Dean D. Cameron Murchison explains “...the beloved community is free to believe, along with the beloved disciple, that the power of God’s love continues to pervade the world, undeterred by waves of death and destruction.”⁵

So why is the good news Jesus brings through the resurrection, which we celebrate especially today, good news for you? If God is God for you forever, how is this good news for you? If God is God for those you love forever, how is this good news for you? If God is God for those you **do not** love forever, how is this good news for you? It is not dependent upon us, or others, for God to be God for us. Associate Dean Gail R. O’Day reminds us “The tomb was empty and Jesus was raised before any of the Gospel characters appeared on the scene.”⁶ That is good news in its own right. And all that stuff you brought with you, the stuff that will not have gone away just because you came to church today? None of it is powerful enough, even combined, to keep God from being our God.

Today we celebrate good news which is good news throughout the year – God is our God forever and part of being our God includes conquering death that we might never be apart from God. Isaiah calls

⁴ *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2*, p. 362.

⁵ *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2*, p. 378.

⁶ *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 2*, p. 377.

this salvation. That deep yearning? That deep searching like we found Mary Magdalene doing? God is to be found. Isaiah speaks of finding this God in the midst of our turmoil, alongside that which worries: “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for God, so that God might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in God’s salvation.” We rejoice because here and now is where and when God meets us. Here and now we are not alone in those things which only we can name, those reasons we need the good news that here and now God is with us. The good news, too, is that the Easter hope is not for Easter alone, or even the season of Easter. **Every** day Paul’s words are true: “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” for Christ is risen - he is risen indeed! Because of this, we rejoice. Thanks be to God!

Let us pray: You are our God for whom we have waited so that we might be saved. We give you thanks and praise that you loved us so much that you give us reason to hope beyond the turmoil of our lives. May we seek you and find you, we pray. Amen.