

Wesley United Methodist Church

March 27, 2016

Easter

"Lord of Life."

Luke 24:1-12

He was eight years old, and mentally challenged. His name was Stephen. I don't know much about him. I only read the story some time back. But I was touched by it. There were seven other children in his church Sunday school class. In the spring as Easter approached the children were asked to bring those L'eggs party hose containers with some object inside which represented new life.

Not wanting to embarrass Stephen, and being afraid he had not understood, the teacher asked the children to place the containers on the table to be opened one at a time. They opened the first and found a tiny flower, and one child said, "That's mine." They opened another, and found a rock. Another child said, "I brought that one." The child explained the rock had moss on it--a sign of life. They opened a third, and a butterfly flew out. Another child spoke up, "That' was mine." They opened a fourth, and it was empty--and the teacher knowing it must be Stephen's reached for another. But, Stephen said, "Don't skip... mine." The teacher said, "But it's empty." And Stephen answered, "That's right. The tomb...was empty, and that is...new life for everyone."

The summer Stephen's condition became more serious, and he died. The children in his class attended his funeral. On his casket they placed eight L'eggs containers--all empty. That is what Easter means: an empty tomb.

It was early that morning that the women made their way out toward the garden tomb to anoint the body of Jesus with spices. Slowly they walked those dark streets, took that little road out toward a grave in a garden. The first rays of light streaked across the sky. The sun peeped over a hill, and reached its ray down into the garden.

And when they came to the tomb they discovered that the stone had been rolled back. What happened here? They peered inside; then stepped in. There was no one there. The body of Jesus was gone. The tomb was empty. Their questions and thoughts were interrupted by those words, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" What a question! Then, those heavenly voices said, "Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and on the third day rise again."

"Yes, he did say that. We remember. But, we did not really believe it. It's really true!" They left the tomb, and hurried to find the disciples, who had been hiding out in the upper room since Friday morning. They told the disciples the good news, but "they did not believe the women."

They must have spent most of the day debating what had happened. "Should we believe this? He did say this would happen. But, we saw him put to death. We know he was dead. John was there. So, where is he now, if the tomb was empty?"

Late that afternoon, two of their friends came in from Emmaus, and told of their experience with a stranger on the road--how he had come to their home and broken bread with them, and how they realized it was the Lord of Life.

Then, suddenly, Jesus came and stood in the midst of them. His unexpected appearance frightened them. Jesus said, "Why are you startled? Why are doubts arising in your hearts? Look at my hands and feet. It's really me! Touch me and see, for a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones like you see I have. Do you have anything to eat?"

He went on to show them how the words of the prophets had been fulfilled, and to tell them that they would be his witnesses when they received the power from on high. The Master has come--come to be Lord of Life. Because of this, nothing has ever been the same since, nor will it ever be.

The Easter message is truly good news. Gospel for us. It is good news about the power of God, the power of good over evil, of life over death, of hope over despair, love over hate, good news about the Master's power. The Lord of Life has power over death. Easter means that, first and foremost. There is power over death. God has that power. It is expressed in Jesus Christ.

They put Jesus on a cross, and drove those nails with a loud thud, through his wrists, and they said to each other, “That’s that. We have taken care of this problem. We don’t have to worry any more about this ‘king of the Jews.’” But they didn’t know that wasn’t that.

They took him down from the cross and sent him off to be laid in a tomb. They said, “We’ll hear no more from him. He’s dead and gone.” But they didn’t know that, though he was dead, he wasn’t gone. It was Yogi Berra who said, “It ain’t over til it’s over.”

They did away with Jesus and they said, “He’s finished. His kingdom is over. His blasphemy is over.” But they didn’t know it wasn’t over. It wasn’t over til Easter morning. He has power over death – and it’s still not over.

God always has the last word. That is the good news of Easter. We think death is the end, that with death everything is over. We dread it. We fear it. When we mourn, we don’t mourn for our loves ones, we mourn for ourselves. As we have to go on without them. An angel came to see a man late in the night, and said, “I have some good news and some bad news.” The man said, “Let me have the good news first.” The angel then told him he had been selected to play in a golf tournament in heaven with Bobby Jones, Bing Crosby, and Babe Ruth. The man asked, “What’s the bad news?” The angel replied, “You tee off at eight o’clock in the morning.” Death is bad news for us. But the good news for us is—the Master has come – to be Lord of Life. And the Lord has power over death. “Let not your hearts be troubled... In my Father’s house are many rooms,” he promised his disciples just the other night. Easter is the proof of it.

We are troubled by many things, aren’t we? Life has a way of getting the best of us. We let it get us down. There are times when some of us feel like giving up. The disciples felt that way on that fateful Passover weekend. But, that was the last time they would ever be that low again. They would have their ups and downs later on. That weekend they learned that they were serving a Risen Savior. That gave them power for living. It gave them hope, courage, stamina. They could face anything.

As long as we believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ we, too, will serve a risen Lord. And, we can face anything that life will send our way. Everything will be alright. Amen.