

Message for the Second Sunday of Easter
April 19, 2020

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with the great joy of the resurrection that I offer you greetings. I pray that you continue to care for yourselves and others through these uncertain times. I share with you the advice of a very dear friend during these times when we are not together and that advice is: pick up the phone and call someone you are thinking about and have not talked to in a while. It will not only make their day, it will also make yours.

There are so many ways we are being challenged during this health crisis, so take a few deep breaths (not just read this - really do it) and remember the One who has created you and loves you and is with you always.

Be kind to yourselves and be kind to one another.

Your sister in Christ

Pastor Denise

Acts 1:1-11

Jesus Taken Up Into Heaven

1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³ After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with[[]water, but in a few days you will be baptized with^[b] the Holy Spirit.”

⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

Grace and Peace to you from God, our Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. AMEN

Christ is Risen!! He is Risen Indeed!! Alleluia

Let us pray:

Loving Lord,

You never left your disciples without the tools they needed to follow your way. So equip us that we might be found faithful witnesses to the joy of your resurrection life. In Jesus name, amen.

Over the past four weeks my daughter Greta, who has returned from Africa to weather the pandemic here with me, and I have decided that each week we will watch a different Tom Hanks movie. We started with *It's a Wonderful Day in the Neighborhood*, then *Saving Mr. Banks* and on deck for next week is *Apollo 13*.

We watched *Saving Mr. Banks* on Easter afternoon. Now if you have not seen the movie, *Saving Mr. Banks* is the story about Walt Disney acquiring the rights to the story of Mary Poppins from the author P.L. Travers to produce the movie. It was a hard fought battle for Walt Disney, as P.L. Travers for very personal reasons rooted in her childhood held on tight to the rights for her story.

At one point after Walt Disney and P.L. Travers had seemed to reach an impasse, Walt Disney sat down with her in her home over a cup of tea and asked her about her very personal connections to this story of Mary Poppins. She was taken aback with his bluntness, after which he said to her, “we who are storytellers, tell our stories to bring hope and healing not only to ourselves, but to others.”

We tell our stories to bring hope and healing.

And not just the stories of our own personal life experiences, but we tell those stories that have shaped our lives to bring hope and healing both for ourselves and for others.

And on this week after Easter, we are reminded in this morning's text of the greatest story of hope and healing that we have claimed as our own,.

And on this week after Easter 2020, in the midst of all we were not able to do, it warms my heart of all the ways the people of Good Shepherd Lutheran have reached out to hear for themselves and share with others our Christian story of what God has done for us through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

This year more than any of my first 5 years of ministry, there seemed to be a heightened awareness and almost a hyper vigilance to make sure that people, who we know and love have had a way to hear *The Story*.

Perhaps it is because we couldn't do what we had always done, that is go to church and listen to the story the way it has always been told and sing the Easter songs that we have always sung.

Perhaps it is because – this year – we all need to grab hold of the hope and healing that our Christian story offers

Perhaps it is because - our Christian story is the only constant we have to cling onto right now as we navigate through these tumultuous times.

But regardless of the reason for this year's passion for telling and sharing our beloved story of God's victory over death; this is what I saw happening. There were texts filled with inspirational music and stories that circulated throughout the congregation, there were phone calls being made and emails sent about the Sight and Sound presentation of *Jesus* on TBN, there were people reading my message on-line and people printing out that message and sharing it with others, there were people visiting our website and clicking on to a virtual worship service, there were people gathered virtually in a Zoom prayer meeting, and there were people tuned into worship services from all around the globe. And that is only what I was aware of.

We are called to be witnesses to the gospel, witnesses to the good news of what God has done for us through the life, the death, the resurrection and the ascension of his beloved son Jesus. And as in a court trial, a witness is one who comes forward to share what they have come to know as the truth.

And this pandemic has forced us to find new and different ways to share the gospel message with others. So that we, as the storytellers - not only can find hope and healing and comfort for ourselves, but can also provide hope and healing and comfort for others.

In this morning's prayer, we acknowledge that God has always given us the tools to spread the good news of what God has done for us through the gift of his beloved Son. Who would have ever thought that the internet or the mail or the phone or the TV would be the tools that would become essential to sharing the joyous celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

As everything for the disciples in this morning's text was new, there was no relying on experience or tradition, there was only trusting in God to inspire them, to guide them and to comfort them as they gingerly stepped forward into an unknown and potentially dangerous world. There was only doing as Jesus has commanded them as they ate dinner together for the last time – love one another – love one another as I have loved you. There was only praying and waiting for the Holy Spirit to empower them.

That seems to be where we find ourselves this morning – with no experience and tradition to rely on, trusting in God to inspire us and guide us as we step gingerly on this new path we never dreamed we would walk on; doing what Jesus has commanded us to do – loving one another – in this new strange way – not with hugs and handshakes – but with phone calls, and texts, and notes; and praying for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to enlighten and empower us with new ways to “be church” together, using new tools to tell our Christian story so that we can bring hope and healing to ourselves and others, while we are loving and caring for one another from afar.

AMEN

I Love to Tell the Story

1 I love to tell the story
of unseen things above,
of Jesus and his glory,
of Jesus and his love.
I love to tell the story,
because I know it's true;
it satisfies my longings
as nothing else would do.

Refrain

I love to tell the story;
'twill be my theme in glory
to tell the old, old story
of Jesus and his love.

2 I love to tell the story:
how pleasant to repeat
what seems, each time I tell it,
more wonderfully sweet!
I love to tell the story,
for some have never heard
the message of salvation
from God's own holy word. *Refrain*

3 I love to tell the story,
for those who know it best
seem hungering and thirsting
to hear it like the rest.
And when, in scenes of glory,
I sing the new, new song,
I'll sing the old, old story
that I have loved so long. *Refrain*

Text: Katherine Hankey, 1834-1911

The Blessing

May the Lord bless you and keep you, shine upon you with grace and mercy and give you what is needed for each new day. In the (+) name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
AMEN