

“Forever!”

Colossians 3:1-4; Matthew 28:1-10

Easter Day, April 20, 2014

Mary Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church, Milford, Connecticut

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Easter’s message is that God’s love lives forever. In the face of death, in the very place of death, new life springs from the love of God that will not be extinguished. Love lives forever!

“The Interpreter” is our monthly United Methodist magazine. In the April issue, Jennifer Rodia of Providence United Methodist Church in Mount Juliet, Tennessee tells the story when one Easter the pastor was setting up the Easter message by saying, “Jesus died.” Suddenly, Rodia’s son, five year old Lukas, blurts out “Jesus died?!?” A kid in the row ahead of Lukas turned around and said, “It’s okay. He’s better now.” Love lasts forever!

Some years ago a parishioner whose grandmother had died several years before said to me “I got a note from my grandma.” Curious, I asked what she meant. “Well, I get a lovely note each month from my grandma.” She went on to say her grandmother held stock in a company that paid monthly dividends, stock she bequeathed to her grandchildren. So there it was, month after month: a reminder of a grandma’s love for her grandchildren. As long as that company is in business and those stocks have value, the love notes will keep coming. Love lives forever.

In the same way, God’s love reaches from beyond time and space to open new horizons and plan new beginnings for each of us. When Jesus says to the two Mary’s, “Do not be afraid” he gives the power of love that lasts forever.

Sure, some folks struggle with Easter and the resurrection. On any given Sunday there is doubt in one pew or another. I don’t make light of that, for only you and God know the fullness of your story, and what hurts and trials stand between you and this love that God gives freely again and again. But I do marvel that some of us, who keep receiving our dividend checks without a thought; blessings without questions (or,

possibly, even gratitude); and who never question that spring will arrive—well, okay, bad example this year—who never question the blooming of the crocus’ and the daffodils: these same folks will struggle with the God who makes these things happen and the power of love that lives forever.

Maybe because “forever” is a long time. We know too well loves’ labors lost; human love fading and frail; promises made and broken. We often say “Nothing lasts forever” and perhaps that reflects the inability of our earthbound minds to comprehend a gift of this magnitude.

But God’s love lasts forever. Over a quarter century ago the nation of South Africa was under a state of emergency. Thousands of anti-apartheid activists had been arrested and a state of violence and terror canvassed the nation. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in a worship service, shouted to all the enforcers of apartheid: “*You have already lost. Come and join the winning side!*” Tutu thundered the Christian hope and claimed the power of Resurrection: that the victory over hate and degradation had already been won through the love of Christ.

This is not a message everyone knows or wants to know. Not everyone **wants** to know that love lives forever, or South Africa’s Pollsmoor Prison and Robbings Island would not have been home to Nelson Mandela for 27 years before finally dismantling apartheid. Not everyone **knows** that love lives forever. The women who went to the tomb were not “*looking for love in all the wrong places;*” they weren’t looking for love at all. They were, we suppose, going as you or I might go to the grave of a loved one: to do the right thing, to leave flowers there, to remember what once was, to ease the pangs of grief.

So what a fright that earthquake must have been! I’ve only been in one earthquake, a 4.0 on the Richter scale: and I thought the boiler in the apartment I was staying in had blown up! Making it worse, it was the very first time I was away from my first child overnight. I cannot imagine experiencing that and adding a heavenly messenger to the mix, notwithstanding the reassuring message “Do not be afraid.” But there it is in the Good Book.

So what do we do? Well, that's in the Good Book, too:

So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" (Matt. 28:8-9)

First, leave the tomb quickly. Whatever it is that has you captive and bound, leave it. Doubt, despair, destructive attitudes or values or behavior: leave that tomb quickly and don't look back.

Second, understand fear **and** joy will be with you. Change can be frightening but we can be joyful because we know how the story will end. *Quo Vadis* is a Latin phrase that means "Where are you going?" or "Whither thou goest?" It comes from a tradition in which Peter, running away from martyrdom in Rome, encounters the Risen Jesus and asks *Quo Vadis?* Jesus replied "I am returning to Rome to be crucified again." Tradition says this awakened courage in Peter to return to Rome and complete his ministry, which included his martyrdom.

In the 1951 movie *Quo Vadis*, Deborah Kerr plays the part of the girl almost devoured by lions let loose on Christians in the Roman arena. Asked if she was afraid when the lions were let loose she said, "No, for I am one of those actresses who read the script through to the end, and I knew that Robert Taylor would rescue me in time." The tigers may be out of the cage but the Gladiator wins!

Third, tell someone. Tell someone about Christ. This is not about haranguing people; it's about sharing joy in faithful living. As someone said, "It's about one person telling another where to find bread." Our Ambassadors, wearing white ribbons today, are just some of our people who are here to offer you a welcome in Christ. Receive it and share it.

Finally, expect to meet Christ. "He's better now!" God is not vanquished, but victor. God continues to shed the white hot spotlight of love on the powers of darkness. God rolls away the stone to release us from our tombs. God in Christ loved us from the beginning and will love us until the end of this life and the beginning of the next and on into the glorious promise of life without end. Love lives forever. He is risen, just as he said. Alleluia!