

“God’s Love Revealed”
Luke 24:1-12
Sunday, March 27, 2016
The Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching

Scripture. Prayer.

Opening.

To quote that famous cartoon character, Charlie Brown: “I’ve developed a new philosophy. I only dread one day at a time.”

On that first day of the week, after Jesus died, the women must have been filled with dread as they walked to the tomb. They had spices with them, to perform their version of embalming. They were in despair. They were grieving. Their friend, their teacher, their master was dead.

During the season of Lent we’ve been talking about God’s love – how God’s love gathers us close, like a mother hen with her chicks. How God’s love never gives up. How God’s love permeates our lives, like a fragrant perfume. During Holy Week we have reflected on the vulnerability of God’s love, in Jesus’ suffering, humiliation, death and defeat on a cross – executed as a criminal.

I. The Cross.

Today, on this glorious Easter Sunday, we come together to celebrate God’s love, as revealed most fully in Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.

But for many of us, it can be difficult to celebrate. We get stuck in the despair of the cross. We get lost in the suffering of life – our own suffering, the suffering we see in the news, the suffering we observe all around us.

“Several years ago, The Saturday Evening Post ran a cartoon showing a man about to be rescued after he had spent a long time ship-wrecked on a tiny deserted island. The sailor in

charge of the rescue team stepped onto the beach and handed the man a stack of newspapers.

“ ‘Compliments of the Captain,’ the sailor said. ‘He would like you to glance at the headlines to see if you'd still like to be rescued!’ Sometimes the headlines do scare us.

Sometimes we feel that evil is winning, but then along comes Easter, to remind us that there is no grave deep enough, no seal imposing enough, no stone heavy enough, no evil strong enough to keep Christ in the grave.” (James W. Moore)

I want to say to you this morning, that whatever cross you are carrying, whatever pain you are suffering, whatever despair you are battling – Jesus walks with you. He knows your sorrows. He’s been there. He walks with you now. You may not even be aware of his presence with you. But he is intimately acquainted with your suffering, and the suffering of the world.

Life is not easy. New York Times columnist Russell Baker once wrote: “The truth is I don’t feel good most of the time and don’t want to. Moreover, I do not comprehend why anyone else should want to.”

If we are about the work of trying to do something great for God, it’s normal to not feel good all the time. It’s normal to not go around feeling happy all the time.

II. The Tomb.

One of the things we dread most is death. One of the realities that steals our happiness and joy most often is the fear of death or the experience of death. We walk through the pain of losing a loved one. We experience the pain of lesser, “little deaths” – a favorite cup falls to the floor and shatters; a favorite dress is ruined by a coffee spill; a flower garden is trampled by rambunctious children; we receive a worrisome report from the doctor; we lose a job...a car...a beloved pet...a home. Our spouse asks for a divorce. Our grown children are too busy to spend the holidays with us anymore.

Death -- whether in its “little” form or in its full-blown tragedy – fills us with grief and dread.

There’s a story about “A minister [who] was preaching and during the course of his sermon asked, ‘Who wants to go to heaven?’ Everyone held up their hands except one young boy. ‘Son, don’t you want to go to heaven when you die?’ ‘Yes sir, when I die, but I thought you was gettin’ up a load to go now.’

“That is probably the attitude of most of us. Most Christians DO figure that when we die we go to heaven to be with the Lord, even if we are not ready to make the trip tomorrow.”

(David E. Leininger)

But whenever we are faced with the inevitability of death, Jesus reminds us that the tomb is not the end of the story. After all, “The Garden Tomb of Jesus is famous because it is empty!”

(David Emmitte)

A tomb is a place of death. In the tombs of our hearts we lock away the dead things in our lives – we hide our pain and our failures...our loss. We hide our feelings of unworthiness and our sense of hopelessness. We roll the stone over the entrance and keep the worst anguish and pain of our lives locked away – from others, yes – but from ourselves, as well. Oh, we know the tomb is there. And we remember what’s in it. We just avoid and hide and ignore and pretend.

With Jesus, the tomb is empty. Jesus rolls the stone away and reveals that death has no power over us. Sin has no power over us. The tomb is empty. With Jesus, we die to the old life of sin and death. With Jesus, we are raised to new life in his kingdom.

III. The Resurrection.

The message of Easter is that our deepest despair is answered by God’s eternal love. Our

deepest pain and sorrow is answered by God's eternal presence with us. Our deepest sense of failure and hopelessness and unworthiness is answered by God's never-ending faithfulness.

John Dunne comments: "The Resurrection is an enormous answer to the problem of death. The idea is that the Christian goes with Christ through death to everlasting life. Death becomes an event, like birth, that is lived through."

Victor Hugo puts it like this: "For half a century I have been writing my thoughts in prose and verse and history and philosophy . . . But I feel I have not said the thousandth part of what is in me. When I go down to the grave I can say, 'I have finished my day's work,' but I cannot say, 'I have finished my life.' My day's work will begin again the next morning. The tomb is not a blind alley; it is a thoroughfare. It closes on the twilight; it opens on the dawn."

On the third day, Jesus is raised from the dead. He conquers the power of sin and death. He is victorious over the cross and the tomb. If you have not yet accepted this truth; if you have not yet claimed Jesus' love for yourself, maybe today's the day. Maybe this Easter is the Easter.

You know, I grew up in the church, and have always had a sense of God's love for me, although I've had periods of doubt and straying away and such, like most people.

Only in recent years have I had a deeper experience of God's love for me -- in the person of Jesus Christ. To know God's love is one thing. To know God's love as most fully revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus -- that is another. To know the Holy Spirit alive within you, witnessing to Jesus' love for you and for me and for all the world -- that is something amazing. It is so amazing, it ought to lead us to go home, as Peter went home: amazed at what has happened!

Closing.

John O'Donohue was born in 1956 and died in 2008. He was a Celtic poet, author &

priest. His poem, “The Eyes of Jesus,” is one of the most beautiful descriptions of Jesus I have ever read. I’d like to share an excerpt with you:

Forever falling softly on our faces,
His gaze plies the soul with light,
Laying down a luminous layer

Beneath our brief and brittle days
Until the appointed dawn comes
Assured and harvest deft

To unravel the last black knot
And we are back home in the house
That we have never left.

Eternity begins today. We have never left our home with God. God dwells among us; we dwell secure in God’s house. Jesus’ victory over death is accomplished. We are deeply loved.

The nature of God’s love is always, to some degree, a mystery to us. May you be overwhelmed, enveloped, and amazed by God’s great love for you this Easter morning.

Amen.