

2022 04 17 – Curiosity & Amazement

Luke 24:1-12 (The Inclusive Bible)

On Good Friday, we listened as various members of our congregation read the story of Jesus' last few hours on this earth. We listened as Jesus was betrayed by Judas in the garden. We listened as Jesus was denied three times by Peter in the courtyard of the high priest. We listened as Jesus was mocked and humiliated by the religious and political leaders of his time. We listened as Jesus was crucified on the cross. And we listened as his body was laid in a tomb cut out of rock. On Good Friday, we listened to the story of Jesus' cruel and violent death.

Death happens in many different ways. Many of us will be able to experience the blessing of dying in old age. We will live out full lives and die of natural causes. Some of us will die earlier in life due to illness and disease. Others will die suddenly and tragically in accidents. Some in our world will die of starvation or exposure to the elements. And still others will die because of violence and war. All we have to do is read, watch, or listen to the news and we are bombarded with stories of death.

Death is inevitable. We are all going to die, eventually. Death comes to every human, every animal, every plant, every fish and every bird. Death comes, in its own time, to every living thing on this planet. Our astronomers tell us that the stars in the sky will eventually die. Even man-made structures such as buildings, bridges and institutions have a finite life-span.

On Palm Sunday, I talked about the fact that several main-line churches in North America, are changing dramatically. Soon they will be unrecognizable. As the number of people in their congregation's decline, their organizational structures are collapsing under their own weight. The United Church of Canada, as we know it, is dying. But this month our Moderator, The Rt. Rev. Richard Bott, wrote an article in the Broadview magazine which included these words:

Dying is inevitable. But it's also irrelevant. Our task is to live out our discipleship, our ministry, to the best of our ability every moment we live. If we do that, death simply doesn't matter!"

<https://broadview.org/our-easter-moment/>

Death doesn't matter?! How can he say that? Death can be incredibly painful. Death is scary. For those who are left behind, the loss can be heart-breaking. We all know, death matters! The reason our Moderator can write these words and mean them is because he knows and lives the Easter story. He knows that God's love can conquer the power of death itself.

When the women went to the tomb on that first Easter morning, they saw that Jesus' body was gone. And the messengers from God asked, "Why do you search for the Living One among the dead?" Jesus was and is risen. I'm not suggesting that his body had somehow been resuscitated, but rather that he lives in a new and a different form. For some of us it's easier to think of that form as love, energy or Spirit. For others, some type of bodily resurrection is key to their understanding. Either way, the gospels tell us that Jesus made his living presence known to those early disciples and we know that he continues to live on

in our lives today. Every Sunday we light the Christ candle and remind ourselves of the presence of the Spirit, Christ's Spirit, the Living Spirit of God.

Last summer, while I was on sabbatical, I spent several days at the King's Fold Retreat Centre in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. While I was there, I did a lot of walking on the paths throughout their property. One morning I noticed a large decaying stump by the side of the path and I thought about the magnificent tree that had once stood in that spot. The tree was now gone, but the decaying stump remained and in that stump was a small but beautiful, wild rose. I stood in amazement and wonder at the beauty of that flower. I took a picture of the scene, recognizing that it was a stunning example of resurrection, of new life after death. The rose looked nothing like the original tree but the gift of its life was still very real.

From the size of the stump, it was clear that the tree had lived a long a productive life. Its roots had held the soil on the edge of a cliff overlooking a large river valley. Its branches had provided a home for the animals and birds that had lived there. Its seeds had provided food for the inhabitants of the forest and had held the possibility of other trees. And now, in death, the nutrients in its stump were able to support the new life that was growing in its place.

When something or someone is dying, when death occurs, it's difficult to imagine that new life is possible. According to the Gospel of Luke, Mary of Magdala, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and the other women, they went and told the apostles that the tomb was empty, that Christ was risen. But to the other

disciples, their story seemed like nonsense and they didn't believe them. They knew that Jesus was dead. That's all there was to it.

But Peter at least had some curiosity, so he got up and he ran to the tomb. And when he saw that it was empty he was full of amazement at what had occurred.

Curiosity and amazement. Last Sunday, I also talked about the fact that we, as the congregation of First United Church, are living in a liminal time, a time between an ending and a new beginning. In these kinds of times, it is curiosity that will lead us to the promise of Easter. Like Peter, even in our disbelief, we need to be curious about the possibility of resurrection, of new life. Like Peter, we need to get up and run to the tomb. This is a time for trying new things, for reaching out into the community and connecting with new partners. This is a time for listening to anyone and everyone who has a new idea. This is a time for openness and amazement and wonder. The women at the tomb saw figures in dazzling garments, who knows what our resurrection messengers may look like and where they may appear?

Curiosity and amazement lead to new ideas and each new idea is like a seed that needs to be nurtured and allowed to grow. Some may die, but others will live and prosper, just as that rose plant grew in the stump of a tree. Yes, the church as we know it, may be dying, but right now, our ministry is about collecting and growing the seeds of new life. This is our resurrection call. This is our path to the promise of that first Easter morning! Hallelujah! Christ is Risen!