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Easter Sunday
Georgetown Presbyterian Church

April 17th, 2022
Luke 24:1-12
More Good News

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened. The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

I live on a street where now that it is getting warmer, we have a weekly visitor. Each Friday afternoon, the familiar and distinct sounds of the ice cream truck floats into our home. It's the little chiming jiggle that calls to mind lines of children with sweaty hands clutching their dollar bills. When you hear that noise you just kind of know what to do - get to your feet and run in the direction of the sound. Pavlov didn't need dogs to figure out if we could salivate just at the sound of bell - all he needed was a group of children and the soundtrack from an ice cream truck. It is a happy noise, a welcome piece of good news coming down the street, and I admit that I love running outside and seeing the excited faces of the kids lining up. But last week something strange happened - it wasn't mostly kids in the line, it was the construction workers that are the building the house across the street, and it was USPS lady who stopped her mail truck to get in line, and it was the nannies with their sleeping babies in the strollers ordering the ice cream. It was mostly grown-ups in that line - and they seriously looked as pleased as children as they pondered the photos of the menu on the side of the truck. Ice cream trucks - not just for children anymore. The truth is we all need these sweet little infusions of joy and simplicity.

Saint Francis of Assisi is someone we associate with seeking joy in the simplicity of life, in birds and animals and nature. He said, "Do few things but do them well, simple joys are holy." This was not the common teaching of his time, his father in Italy was greedily buying up the small farms of local debtors and becoming a very wealthy entrepreneur. He encouraged Francis to follow him in the business world. But Francis sought a different kind of life. He wanted to cultivate a deep inner life, he wanted to be in a place where shadows and mystery and paradox were held and studied and honored. The church at the time was out of touch with the masses and filled with ostentatious leaders and pompous rituals.

All of this pushed Francis outside, away from the city, where he came to realize and that the Incarnate Jesus was his center. And that Jesus wasn't limited to the palaces or the cathedrals but could be found right in front of us - with a bird, or a flower, or a person, or an ice cream truck.

The antidote to the chaos and the confusion of life and the evil of the world was the simplicity of God's creation. On this most holy day of the Christian faith, we embrace all the mystery and the holiness of the resurrection, and we do so quite simply. The mystery of Easter is extraordinary and yet the symbols of the day are simple – bunnies, eggs, flowers, crosses, and bonnets. Simple, everyday symbols for the most holy of mysteries, that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again from the dead. The juxtaposition of the miraculous and the simple is something Francis would have appreciated.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?” That was the question the angels asked the women who were visiting the tomb on that first Easter morning. It was what Francis realized he was doing – looking for the living among the dead. It is what we spend so much time doing looking for life among things that are dead and meaningless and shallow.

Rarely do we do what Francis did and look for God in what is simple – we prefer the complicated, the extravagant, the cutting edge. We seek strides in medicine, in science, in technology, in the thought, in warfare. We have robots who can do our taxes and drones who can deliver our packages and security cameras that can read our eyeballs. High tech, very advanced, and in some ways, life has gotten better, and more efficient, but in other ways we are making no progress at all in attaining the good life. All these advancements have taken us away from that which is simple, and pure, and holy --- and it has not served the soul well. It has not served the heart well. It has not served the community well.

Our advances have left us powerful and effective, incredibly well networked, and informed but tragically depleted in the most important areas of our lives. The inner life has not been fed. We have forgotten that fundamentally, we are spiritual beings. We are not political beings or professional beings or social beings or intellectual beings or physical beings – we are spiritual people – we have been created in the image of God, with God's imprint upon us. So why do we spend so little time looking for life in all the wrong places?

If I read one more article about the vast and varied mental health issues of adolescents right now, I will scream. Not because I don't believe them because I do but I want to scream because it is so hard to envision a successful course correction. Lots of teenagers have been given the tools and resources to be “successful” but they are flailing and really, really struggling. Who has failed them? The church, the culture, the parents, the schools, the internet? It isn't just teenagers – we are all gasping for air. People are unhappy and unhealthy in mind and spirit and soul. We are starved for meaning. We are not people who grounded in faith or in God in or holy mystery or in the beauty of God's creation. We are unmoored, lacking any times to things of meaning, to things that are true, to things that are eternal.

Yale Law Professor and cultural critic, Stephen Carter says that “there's no belief in anything except power, possessions, and prestige in America, despite a religious façade.” Ouch! I am sure none of you are here because you are looking for a religious façade. But if what we do here on Easter Sunday is simply tell you a story, listen to some pretty music and all go home to our nice lunches then yes, it is a religious façade lacking depth and connection to any real meaning. On Easter Sunday, the church must resist the temptation to give Christians something prepacked

and bite sized. No theologian or preacher can parse Easter down into a three-point sermon on the resurrection of Jesus and go home and feel like they really fulfilled their mission.

Easter is the absolute pinnacle of holiness and mystery and the best thing the church can do for you today is hold it up this mystery for you to ponder. Reveal for you the stone rolled away and let you peer into the emptiness and marvel at God's glory. Remind you that there is life beyond death and having this faith gives our lives meaning. The best thing we can do today is sit in the sacred space of God's presence and ponder life after death. Or rather ponder living life without the fear of death. Dorothee Soelle, German theologian, writes, "To participate in the resurrection means that our lives don't lead toward what is dead, are not exposed to death's magnetic attraction. To be a Christian means that death is behind us...When death is behind us – which means the fear of death and the greed for what is dead – then the love into which we grow is ahead of us."

When death is behind us then love is ahead of us. Wasn't that the point of Easter, to release us from death to life, from sorrow to joy, from hatred to love? Imagine if love was all we had to look forward to...only grace, only joy, only simplicity, only good news only love. Death, fear, pain, brokenness, tears no more – those things were all behind us. And they will all be behind us one day. God made that possible for us in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. Our charge is to believe it – to believe he rose from the dead so that we could be free to live our lives in love.

Why do you look for the living among the dead? It is Easter morning, Christ is Risen. We do not need to live in fear of death. Your whole life is ahead of you, you now must go and live it fully. You are a spiritual being. Feed your spirit, nourish your soul, live in love for the stone has been rolled away.

Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Happy Easter. Amen.