

Calvary United Methodist Church
April 21, 2019
8 AM & 11 AM Worship Service

HE HAS RISEN
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

Children's Message:

John 20:1-8

I invite our children to come forth this time for the children's message. Come on up! Good to see everyone here this morning.

Eastertime is a great celebration. We do so many things, and yet for those of us who gather, sometimes what happens on this weekend is quite a mystery to us. I want to just talk a little bit about what those mysteries are like. Are there things in this world you don't understand? Hmmm. There are many things in this world I don't understand. Part of it is sometimes we just believe in faith and so there is a passage of scripture here from Hebrews I want to read:

Faith means being sure of the things we hope for. And faith means knowing that something is real even if we don't see it.

I am going to talk about that in just a little bit because life changes so many times and there are so many things I've not seen but I know they are real. I know I breathe oxygen. Can you see it? Can you grab it? Not really well. There are a lot of things I've seen all winter for instance. Most of the flowers outside took naps. Did you notice that? You didn't see a lot of flowers popping up in the snow until just a couple of weeks ago. Did you see the flowers lately? Spring comes and it is like all those things that were sleeping are coming awake and it's pretty amazing to see the flowers blooming and see the beauty all around us.

Did any of you get up this morning and thinking you were going to see this? Nobody? You did see a bunny this morning? Well, spring is also a time when we see much new life. The flowers are budding, the trees are blooming and we see little baby rabbits around; ducks; a lot of little critters start to have babies in the spring because the weather is warmer and it is safer for them to develop. A lot of them hang out with their mother. Oh, that's not their mother.

But, every little critter that is out there they find someone and I know when I used to get up on Easter morning I would often want to see a bunny, but I wanted to see this kind of bunny. Do you like these kind? (Yeah.) Yeah, me too! Dark chocolate would have been better, but we'll take it.

Well, Easter is about a lot of things. Sometimes it is about the Easter egg hunts we have and it's about the bunnies we get. For some today it will be about family time. I imagine many of you are going to see grandparents and aunts and uncles and brothers and sisters and moms and dads and friends. It's just a great time to feast and to nap and to do fun things.

But of all the things Easter is, they are all good. But that's not really what it's about. It's really about God's love. We come here week after week to know about God's love and Easter is perhaps the largest story. We talk at Christmas about a gift that God gave us in His Son, Jesus, and at Eastertime we talk about another gift that Jesus gave us because it is new life and it's eternal life. God's Son named Jesus walked this earth for quite a few years and he taught us how to love one another, how to accept other people even though we are different, how to forgive people when they hurt you.

He just taught us so much, but not everybody liked Jesus and unfortunately in this past week we read a lot of stories that Jesus died. And it was a very sad time. A lot of the people who followed him were very sad because they thought he was going to be the one to change the world in new ways, but when he died they thought that might be over. And they buried him in tomb that is not quite like our cemeteries. It was carved in the rock or like a cave and they put a big rock over it to protect him because they were afraid someone might take his body. As it was, a group of women went early in the morning. We do a lot of different things to preserve our bodies, but they put anointing oil on them to bless them and they put perfumes on them. And when they went his body was gone. And they couldn't quite get in their mind, didn't understand, how could someone dead be gone and they forgot that he told them he was going to raise from the dead.

So, they went and told other disciples and Peter and John came a running and they too were amazed because his clothes were there, but his body was gone and they didn't know what to do with this. You see, what they knew in their mind and what they saw didn't make sense at all, because he promised he was risen and he was indeed.

Have you ever had days when they were rough, like you were put in your room and told you weren't behaving and you had to sit and think about it for a while. Everybody out there should have their hand up. I know some of you. Right? Well, when I was young that would do too and sometimes I would think: Why was I in trouble with Mom or Dad or grandparents or school teachers? What did I do? And we think a lot, but after while they come in and they say you can come out now, meaning it is forgiven, right? You can come out and play; you can come out.

And here's what happened: when Jesus came out of the grave it was like everything was made wonderful again. It is like when you come out of your room, your parents say you are forgiven and you can get on with life and we get all these great things going and it's a wonderful thing.

I know when I've been driving the last few weeks up along the road, have you ever seen trees like this lately? They were pretty dead over winter because most trees other than evergreens, I don't understand it, but I know they have to take a nap and then in the spring they start getting buds like around here and then in the next two to three weeks our trees and our forests

are going to be total green. Isn't that wonderful? And that's because we are going to go from spring into summer and it's new life. But I don't understand it. It just happens. It is a plan of God's.

Now, I want to show you a picture of the ocean. Does that look like the ocean? (No.) Now, come on. How many of you have been to the ocean? What's in the ocean? (Fish.) What's that? So that's the ocean, right? (No!) Well, the ocean is a lot bigger. I mean if you look up here it's bluer than the back screen. That's a lot of water. You see, all the water on earth from the rains and everything else is either going to evaporate or it's going to end up in one of the oceans of the world. That's bigger than I can understand, but I believe it.

How many of you have ever seen snow-capped mountains in the summertime? Not a lot in Pennsylvania, do you? They aren't here. This is actually out in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, but there are many places around our globe. Do you believe it could be there? Even though you've not seen it, see, you believe it.

How many of you have seen a whale up personal? This whale is forty tons! That's big! How many of you have seen a whale? A couple of you. The rest of us: do you believe there are whales? But you've not seen them; how do you believe that? You just believe it, right?

Well, that's how it is with our faith. Sometimes we look at our grandparents and our parents and other people. Have you ever notices some of us look older? Do you believe you'll get there someday? I got there quicker than I ever could imagine. And I imagine a lot of you have done that. So, we don't understand these things. How many of you have even flown in an airplane? I always thought it would be nice, I'm not sure I want to fly alone in something like that, but long time ago, not that long ago, only in the beginning 1900 people thought surely they could fly and everybody thought they were crazy. But it expanded and now we fly with not a couple of people but 40, 50 or 100 or 200 and now there are over 500 people in one plane. That's pretty amazing.

You see, we don't always understand. When those ladies went to the tomb they didn't understand, but they believed and they had faith. When we come here today, it's about having faith that the tomb is empty and that we know that because the tomb is empty, Jesus is alive and he's alive in your hearts and in my heart and anybody that will accept him and love him and he wants us to be his light to other people because it will fill them with life. It will make them happy. It lets us know we are forgiven and that whatever mistakes we've done, we have a new chance at living.

So, of all the great things you want to remember today, one is faith means knowing that something is real even if we don't see it and I have a little Frisbee I am going to pass around, everybody take one to be sure everyone gets one, I'll throw some out there in the back, how about sharing some with others around you and what it says is that: Jesus lives for me. I am the resurrection and the life. Did everybody get one? I thank you for coming up and pray

that you will let Jesus live in your heart. Thank you and God bless your week.

Message:

Well, it's been a week of ups and downs. I'm talking from the scriptural point of view. From the arrest of Jesus to the crucifixion of Jesus to our own Good Friday experience, the darkness, you can only imagine what it would be like to be there, our Savior, and have everyone walk away. But it was predicted that every last one of his followers would walk away from him. And as it was days later all those folks fearing for their own life could not quite imagine what was yet to be.

And then it was the morning and they wanted to do what we do when we go to a cemetery: they wanted to honor their dead. And their practice would be to take perfumes and anointing oil and the women went early in the morning and they were shocked to see the stone had been rolled and not only that, they weren't sure what was going on. His body was gone. What a frightening experience in a time when everyone was wondering: does this mean their lives will still be taken and someone was trying to hide all these facts.

We are all that Monday night football, the day after. We are looking at history and we know the rest of the story that they didn't. And so they were bewildered, they were frightened and all of those things and in the depths of their heart they wanted to believe, but it was such a rare experience because even though they had seen Jesus raise someone from the dead and they saw him heal the blind and heal the lame, it was still fairly rare to them. They weren't getting the whole scoop. And the women, Mary Magdalene in particular, went back and got the men and they came.

And in this whole experience, they finally, it said, they finally what? Believed. Praise God for their belief that has been passed on generation after generation that we might be here today.

There are a couple of points in there that really stand out for me and the one was that Mary Magdalene had this close relationship with Jesus because he's the one that cleansed her and gave her new life. And she wanted that life. She wanted to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ.

One of the greatest things that happened that morning, she went there and didn't see anyone and finally there was this someone and one of the scripture references said they thought it was the gardener. And she asked where Jesus was and Jesus said these words: Mary. Can you imagine? The one you've loved, the one you've sought, you thought they were gone and they recognized you. And at that moment, Mary came alive again because she knew now that the Savior who had promised that he would raise again indeed had come back.

Our Lord and Savior is a relational master. We come here today and we come week after week because we desire a relationship. I don't know about you, but I need God so much eve-

ry day of my life. There are parts of me that I don't like. There are probably parts of you you are not too happy with. I get mad and I don't want to be mad and I get angry and I don't want to be angry and I get unforgiving and I don't to be unforgiving. And then I get mad about finances and I get mad about death and loss in my family and among my friends, and the frustrations of the nations and all of that stuff, it gets to us. And Jesus says: Jeff, let me be your friend. He says that to all of us. Let me be your friend. Just like he knew Mary, Jesus knows each of us as much as he said: as the hair on your head or the grains of sand at the sea. Our God wants to be in a personal relationship with you and that comes from calling on his name.

Most of our friends like that we keep contact with them. We call them. We might Facebook or Instagram. You might drive by, you might visit. But friendships take work. Jesus doesn't want it to be work, he wants it to be pleasure. As we come into our relationship with the Son of God, we will find healing for our souls, peace for our lives.

With relationships comes responsibility. I can't tell how many times in my life my parents trusted me with so many things and with it came responsibility. I can't tell you how many times God has trusted me with giving life to others. I am no different than you. You call someone, you visit someone in a hospital, a nursing home, shut-in, you send someone a note and they call and they say: thank you, thank you! I needed that today. That's being responsible to the nudging of God's Holy Spirit, God calling out to you to reach out in His name, to be light, to be hope, to be resurrection, to life someone up that's down. Every one of us here is broken and there are days we don't even know what to do. Some of us are not in prison, but we are imprisoned, because we refuse to forgive ourselves.

This day, of all days, and every time we receive these precious gifts, this reminder of the presence of God in our lives, He is saying: would you get over your past, would you see that today is your day. Comes out of the tomb. Be resurrected. Find new life. And be life to everyone you meet.

Our world is awful dark. It's filled with ugliness. It's filled with pain. It's filled with suffering and our Lord today came out of the tomb and says: I am the resurrection. I am new life. I hold the keys of hell and death and because I live you shall live also.

He wants you to live today. So, I pray, in this hour, in this moment as you receive these gifts, you allow the forgiveness of God's grace to come over you. You will find new life, new hope and you will go forth empowered by the Father and the Son and the Spirit and you will do great things for Almighty God and that you will be the light unto the world. Thanks be to Almighty God that he trusts us with such a powerful, powerful message of hope. Amen.