**It’s Easter: Let’s Dance!**

A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Ledlie I. Laughlin

Luke 24:1-12 ~ Easter 2022

 Alleluia! Christ is risen!

In the name of the Risen Christ. Amen.

We are here! It’s Easter morning and we are here – together, praise God! The Gospel tells us the resurrection took three days; by my count it has been three years. We made it! Singers. Musicians. Ministers. Ushers. Elders. Youngers. In the building. Or through livestream. Hooray!

And our hearts? Dear ones, what is on your heart this Easter morn?

Loving God, look upon your people: We come with joyful expectation; with grateful hearts. We come with hurt and heartbreak; with worry too. We come with hope and delight. We come with prayers for the world, for ourselves, for those whom we love, those we struggle to love. With loss and with promise. Above all, we come in the hopes, dear God that you will fill our hearts anew. We come with hope.

What is ***your*** hope? God knows our hearts, our inmost selves. The first Easter changed forever the lives of those first disciples. So, today, for you? Oh God, hear our prayer. Amen.

The women came early that morning, at dawn. The cool night air still lingered before the heat of the day. As was the custom, the women came with spices to anoint Jesus’ body. They had no need to speak with one another. They honored the still quiet of the morning, the empty ache, the exhausted tears dry on their cheeks. The silence of the morning made loud the silent bewilderment of their hearts – of events gone terribly awry; the deceit, betrayal; Jesus’ submission; his dignity and resolute love.

In Luke’s telling the women did not see or meet the risen Christ. Neither did Peter who followed after them. They simply found the tomb, empty. Perplexed. Two men in dazzling clothes announce, “He is not here, but has risen.” The women stood now between the recent memory of the Jesus’ they’d known and loved and last seen, his broken body taken from the cross… between that Jesus, and the risen Christ they’ll meet some days hence – with others, in the breaking of bread, the opening of scripture, the gift of revelation, in gentle touch; joyous amazement; the call to love.

People of faith – and of no faith, of lost faith and deep faith – have stood in this empty in-between space since that very first Easter. And wondered, what are we to make of this?

There are two things on my heart to say about Easter this year.

The first is this: the joy of new life is not separate from the pain of loss. The pain is part of the joy. I think we’ve all become more attentive these past couple of years to this unresolved tension. Easter begs the question: How do we proclaim victory and joy when so much is still broken, when there is quite literally a world of hurt – within and all about us, and when we continue to perpetrate hurt despite our deepest intentions?

I keep returning to Carl Jung’s observation when, in 1954, with the Cold War tension between Russia and the United States at an extreme, a student asked what he thought of the likelihood of nuclear war. Jung responded, “I think it depends on how many people can stand the tension of the opposites in themselves. If enough can do so, I think the situation will *just* hold, and we shall be able to creep around innumerable threats and thus avoid the worst catastrophe of all.”

The redemptive love of God revealed in Easter does not remove pain or sin or death – clearly. But it does reveal the way of salvation whereby we can live in pain, with sin, and death, yet live with love, forgiveness, joy, and yes – new life.

Some years ago, Archbishop Desmond Tutu traveled to Dharamsala to spend a week with the Dalai Lama in celebration of the latter’s eightieth birthday. The Book of Joy recounts their time together – a mix of wisdom, beauty, and a lot of laughter! Each spoke of this tension – holding suffering with compassion as the way to joy – and redemption. The Dalai Lama described a practice of Buddhist meditation, beginning close in with attention on our own suffering, then moving out in ever-widening circles, attentive to the pain in our family, our community, our nation, the world. Mindful now of the suffering experienced by all, our own pain no longer has claim upon us, and we are free to live with compassion and joy.

Archbishop Tutu spoke of a similar journey, but as a physical practice, physically crossing every division to stand and be with the other. This is the embodied practice of Christ’s resurrection. We know Tutu’s life’s testimony: marching, advocating, protesting, then truth-telling, listening, crying, and forgiving, that leads now to touching, caressing, kissing, irrepressible laughing.

Assistant to Presiding Bishop Curry, the Rev. Stephanie Spellers describes this resurrection practice as solidarity: “Solidarity is love crossing the borders drawn by self-centrism, to enter into the situation of the other, for the purpose of mutual relationship and struggle that heals us all and enacts God’s beloved community.

Says she, “Solidarity is the voice that finally comprehends: “You are not the same as me, but part of you lives in me. Your freedom and mine were always inextricably entwined. Now I see it, and because of what I see, I choose to live differently. I will go there, with you, for your sake and for my own.”

This leads to the second truth on my heart revealed in Easter’s redemptive love: We belong to one another. Easter is for all of us: together. Archbishop Tutu describes this as *ubuntu*. Says Tutu, “A person is a person through other persons. None of us comes into the world fully formed. We would not know how to think, or walk, or speak, or behave as human beings unless we learned it from other human beings. We need other human beings in order to be human. I am because other people are.”

 We heard this reflected just ten days ago in the words of Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson as she spoke on the South Lawn of the Whitehouse. She did not speak of her own giftedness or accomplishments; she said thank you – to many, many, many people, one by one, from her parents to the aides who helped prepare her for the hearings.

Said Justice Jackson, “To be sure, I have worked hard to get to this point in my career, and I have now achieved something far beyond anything my grandparents could've possibly ever imagined. But no one does this on their own. The path was cleared for me so that I might rise to this occasion.”

“I am standing on the shoulders of … generations of Americans who never had anything close to this kind of opportunity but who got up every day and went to work believing in the promise of America….” We belong to one another.

We belong to one another. This is the truth we affirm as we gather together as church, in the very act of being here. It’s an Easter proclamation that we reaffirm every Sunday in our prayers that reach deep within and far beyond, that we receive in the feast we share. From archbishops and supreme court justices to you and to me, we share in the redemptive power of the resurrection as we cross each and any of the divisions that separate us. Your acts of compassion, your hospitality for the stranger, your advocacy. The confession you make and the forgiveness you receive. Your love. In the heartbreak and compassion, sacrifice and generosity, the gentle caress, the bursts of laughter and joy; these are the movements of God’s love. This is the embodiment of the resurrected Christ. This is Easter!

You know the expression, *What Would Jesus Do?* I’ve been teased, Ledlie, don’t ask that; it will make you all earnest. No, you need to ask, What Would Desmond Do? – Desmond Tutu, that is.

Why? Because every time you see Desmond Tutu, he is all smiles, laughing or dancing with joy. All that he lived through – and it’s all about joy. He and the Dalai Lama together –the two of them just giggle like a pair of mischievous little boys.

 What Would Desmond Do this Easter morn? First, he’d burst out laughing, that anyone would ask such a question. Being Easter, he might remind us of the promise of heaven: “We may be surprised at the people we find in heaven” said he. “God has a soft spot for sinners. His standards are quite low.”

“In the end what matters is not how good we are but how good God is. Not how much we love [God] but how much [God] loves us. And God loves us whoever we are, whatever we’ve done or failed to do, whatever we believe or can’t.”

Then he would ask about and enter the pain in our lives, name the truth, take hold of one another in love, and begin to dance. Gathering each one by the hand, forming a great circle to dance and dance and dance all the day long into the beloved community of God.

Whatever else you do this day, get up and dance. Let’s do it!

Alleluia! Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!