

Easter Sunday

Sunrise still happened.
I hope you had breakfast.
I cannot wait until we are able once again to share it together
at Valley Forge United Methodist Church.
Happy Easter.
Christ has risen! He has risen in deed!

The Easter message for today is found in Matthew 28:1-10.
After the Sabbath,
as the first day of the week was dawning,
Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.
And suddenly there was a great earthquake;
for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven,
came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.
His appearance was like lightning,
and his clothing white as snow.
For fear of him the guards shook
and become like dead men.
But the angel said to the women,
“Do not be afraid;
I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.
He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.
Come, see the place where he lay.
Then go quickly and tell his disciples,
‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee;
where you will see him.’ This is my message for you.”
So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy,
and ran and told his disciples.
Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!”
And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.
Then Jesus told them,
“Don’t be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Let us pray: Both the angel and Jesus asks us not to be afraid. But life can be scary. Life is so unpredictable. Life is so uncontrollable. Thank you for assuring us that you are always one step ahead of us, preparing a way for us, so we can embrace the fullness of life unafraid. Hold us now in your loving arms, risen Christ. Amen.

“Don’t Be Afraid”

Don't be afraid, Jesus is alive. Don't be afraid, Jesus is going on ahead of you. Don't be afraid Jesus has not left you orphaned. He has risen! He has risen indeed!

I serve a living Savior he's in the world today;
I know that he is living whatever foes may say.
I see his hand of mercy, I hear his voice of cheer,
and just the time I need him, he's always near.
He lives, he lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.
He lives, he lives salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know he lives?
He lives within my heart.

We do not have to be afraid because Christ is here. He is not buried away in a dusty tomb. He is not just an historical person, we are not having to await his return. Jesus is present in the here and now. But so often we live as though he is not. We act like we are still awaiting for him to arise from the dead. The Good news is that He has risen! He has risen in deed!

If Jesus is alive, where is he? The truth is that Jesus is now everywhere. There is nowhere where Jesus is not able to be. No longer confined to this human dimension of existence Jesus has none of the human limitations that slow us down. Jesus can appear in a locked room to bless the disciples because he is free to enter any where. Jesus can walk the dusty road and talk theology, and then disappear after he has broken bread and blessed it at their meal. Jesus can even encounter Saul on the road to Damascus and then later be his teacher in the desert, even after the ascension. His appearances in the lives of the saints has gone on for millennia and continues to this day.

When ever two or more are gathered in the name of Jesus Christ, Jesus promises to be there in the midst of them. So have you looked closely for the Christ who dwells in the lives of those around you? Have you listened closely to your own heart? Have you found that Christ who always dwells there? This is why the spiritual practice of Centering prayer can become so enriching, as you just sit in the presence of God day after day, year after year. You get to appreciate his loving presence intimately. This communion grows richer with time. At first it may feel silly, but with time you find the comfort of just being together. Like an old couple filled with a lifetime of love, who just sit without saying a word, but with a knowing of each other's love that envelops them.

Jesus is present with the least among us in a special way. Jesus says how we treat them, we treat him. If you want to do something meaningful for Christ, do it for them. If you want to tell Jesus that you love him, tell the unloved that you love them and enter into a real relationship with them. If we ignore them, Jesus says we are ignoring him. If we harm them, Jesus says that we are responsible for harming him. Jesus chooses to live a life closely enmeshed within the lives of the poor, the oppressed, and the struggling. Jesus is so alive, so close, so knowing in the world today.

If you do not feel that closeness, it may be because you are not struggling, you are not oppressed, you are not hurting. However, when the dark night of the soul comes upon your life, and you seem to lose everything you hold dear, what you will find left, is Christ who never leaves us. We just haven't always notice.

Paul told the Colossians that in Christ all things hold together and without him everything would fall apart. Jesus is here, He is just so, so much bigger now. Jesus is everywhere and touching everything and everyone. Jesus is the one who is the source of prevenient grace, God's working in every single life to bring us to a fuller and fuller salvation. There is no life anywhere that Jesus our living savior is not working with to improve their lives. You are included in this divine embrace, all you need to do is take the time to notice. But Jesus is still there working away, even if you don't.

Those who know me, know that I have often said that it is so very sad that there are people who say that God has never spoke to them. It is sad because, Jesus is always speaking to us. We just tend to be too busy to listen. Our lives are so noisy, that we have to find spiritual practices that slow us down, so we can be attentive to what God is saying in our hearts. We walk labyrinths, write in journals, color mandelas, do lectio Divina, meditate and seek mindfulness, all to be more attentive to the living Christ. We do these things to quiet our lives so we can hear what Christ is struggling to tell us.

I have found that Christ speaks to me when I read scripture, read a book, listen to music, contemplate art, watch a movie, Jesus always seems to have something to say. Christ, you see is alive and chooses to have personal relationships with us, each tailor made to each of our lives, always seeks a language that we will understand. Jesus is alive and wants to be more involved, just waiting for an invitation.

The fact that Jesus is alive, can be frightening, to those trying to silence him, or keep him from interfering with their plans for their own lives. They are afraid, because they know that if Jesus comes into their lives nothing will be the same. He will turn everything up side down. He will make life more unpredictable and way out of their control. Jesus is always on the move and always ready to do something new, to say something new to stretch our imaginations, to show us something new that changes everything we have ever believed in. Jesus is always ready to create all things new.

Life is a journey they say, and Jesus promises to be a traveling companion with us forever, even to the very end of the age. Don't be afraid for Christ has risen. He has risen in deed. Happy Easter! Keep Safe!

Let us pray: Jesus, thank you for being here and with us all. Thank you for choosing to stick with us through thick and thin. Keep us attentive to what you want to do next so we might join with you as you continue to bring salvation to the world. Amen.

I want to thank everyone who has continued to support Valley Forge United Methodist Church during this pandemic, your tithes and offering have been much appreciated and have helped us greatly. Please continue. One day this will end and we will be together at that very special place dear to our hearts. Now may God bless you and keep you and continue to watch over you. Amen.