

2nd Sunday of Easter – 2021B

We live in a day of self-destructing messages. These messages are sent, received and destroyed on hundreds of millions of smartphones and tablets around the world every day, usually by teenagers. The reason for embracing this technology is because it leaves no trace. The most popular app, by far, is Snapchat. It allows you to take photos and videos, or send text and drawings, to a friend with a timer attached. When the message has been viewed and the timer runs out, the message deletes -- as if it never existed.

These days, the temporary, the anonymous or the self-destructing message is more possible than ever. And yet on Easter morning, we see God doing something for the world, something that will last, will resonate, forever. There is no Snapchat, or self-destructing messages with God. When God speaks, it is unmistakable and un-erasable.

Psalm 118 is, perhaps, an unlikely text for Easter Sunday and today, the 2nd Sunday of Easter. Yet, a review of this psalm is deeply satisfying as it connects an enduring and lasting theme with the resurrection. Psalm 118 urges us to confess these words, "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever". Until the moment that Jesus Christ broke down the dividing line between life and death, one could have made a case that God's unrelenting love -- in Hebrew, his **chesed**, actually had some serious limits. The God who made the mountains and hung the stars was still anonymous to those who didn't have the Torah. And the God of the Torah had established a system of promises and sacrifices that, at best, offered just a glimpse of God's glory, God's power and goodness. Not only that, but, whether you were an Israelite or an unremarkable Gentile, you lived in a world where death had not been defeated. It was a world where all of the promises and powerful demonstrations of God felt finite and erasable when compared to the behemoth of death.

Sure, God told us that death would be deleted, defeated, erased and undone. But that message self-destructs when we're actually confronted with it, knowing that no one in the history of the world has overcome it. And then Jesus happened! Yes, Jesus lived a life that mere mortals could not live. And yes, he died the crushing, punishing death that humanity deserved. But all of that means nothing if Easter doesn't take place. He rose from the grave, and, in doing so, showed his power over death, the one thing that has made all of humanity, Jew or Gentile, Christian or not, feel utterly powerless.

By rising from the dead, Jesus Christ gave every other promise of God instant credibility, as well as un-deletable and "un-erasable" power. Jesus died and came back. And that means every promise he ever made, every word that he ever offered, is a promise and a word on which we can utterly rely. Resurrection is not some kind of Snapchat app. It is not a secret that is shared anonymously. Resurrection cannot be deleted. Resurrection endures. Resurrection resonates. The truth of the resurrection is everlasting. It's a demonstration of God's love that will only be outdone when the resurrected Jesus returns to resurrect us all, which, just a reminder, he's promised to do.

The very celebration of Easter, that you and I take part in, is evidence of the magnitude of Christ's work and of God's love. Think about it. On Easter morning, whether our church is bursting at the seams or comprised of a faithful few, we are joining with millions of other people around the globe at the same time, celebrating the same truth. Not only that, we are taking part in a celebration that has been rippling through human history for more than 2,000 years. There are those who refuse to believe in the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, what cannot be denied is that, a very, very long time ago, something so seismic, so incredible and so amazing took place, that people are still talking about it today.

Something so huge happened that the majority of the world now measures time against it. Jesus did something, Jesus was someone, so consequential that his life became the pivot point of human history. We struggle to remember

something that happened just days ago. And yet the world is still running from the empty tomb of Jesus Christ breathless, excited and full of wonder. Something happened there.

Luke's gospel describes Peter's response like this: "He rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened". Thousands of years later, the world is still marveling at the events of Easter morning. The impact of this message and this moment refuse to fade away. Since the message is still resonating, its benefits are still in play, and the implications are still enjoyable. The world gathers, not just to celebrate this demonstration of God's love and power in the past, but to receive and bask in the fruit of it today.

Apps like Snapchat are designed to help you avoid implications. Easter morning provides unavoidable, unforgettable and perpetually enjoyable implications. Perhaps the greatest gift that it offers is that of peace.

Following the resurrection, the disciples locked themselves in the upper room afraid of the fallout. Jesus, resurrected and beautiful, stepped into their angst-ridden hideout repeating one phrase over and over: "Peace be with you." He didn't do this just to help the disciples avoid freaking out as they gazed at their once-dead rabbi now standing before them fully alive. No, he was proclaiming the implication of his resurrection: peace to troubled hearts!

The biggest and meanest monster in the world is the grave. But the grave has been beaten! Have peace. If Jesus is more powerful than death, is he more powerful than the loss of a job, the sickness our friend is experiencing, or the evils of international terrorism? Yes. Have peace. If Jesus has conquered death, as promised, then he can be trusted with everything else he has promised. He promised to be the sacrifice for our sins making us right with God, believe him. Have peace. If Jesus promised to hear our prayers when we cry out in weakness, and to fill us with his Holy Spirit to make us strong, believe him. Have peace. If Jesus promised that he will return from the right hand of God, resurrect us all and

right every wrong that still exists in this world until we, his forgiven people, reside with him in a new creation, believe him. Have peace. As the psalmist notes in today's text: "I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord". Jesus has promised never to leave us or forsake us, but to be with us in our cancer, in our divorce, in our depression, in our loneliness, in our breakups and in our breakdowns. He promised to be with us in our bad hair days, believe him. He is risen. Have peace.

In a world where everything is caught on tape or stored in the Cloud on some hard drive far, far away, we're intrigued by the idea of being able to erase our actions and avoid implications. So, we download apps that allow us to set a timer for our text message or send a secret note to a select few.

Thankfully, the kingdom of God is not like that. The love of God does not self-destruct. When God speaks, when God works, God does so in public, powerful and world-changing ways. The resurrection is the decisive event demonstrating that God's kingdom really has been launched on earth as it is in heaven. The message of Easter is that God's new world has been unveiled in Jesus Christ and that we are now invited to belong to it." Alleluia, Alleluia.

Deacon Gerry

