

Easter Sunday April 16th 2017

NEW BEGINNINGS

A Reflection by Peggy Jensen

Prayer;

God of joy and delight, open our hearts to receive the risen Christ with hope in the new life you promise. A new way of being, a new relationship with Christ, who shows us how to love one another. We are searching for some understanding of our new life together as a Shared Ministry. We pray for guidance and patience as we continue this journey. In the name of the Risen Christ we pray. Amen

The tomb is empty, really empty. Peter and Mary were shocked and terrified! Here we are centuries later, celebrating the empty tomb because we know the joy of resurrection and new life. *At least that is what we are supposed to do on Easter morning.*

Do you have trouble rolling the stone away?

Do you find it hard to accept that Jesus is alive and wants to give you new life too?

Knowing that Jesus was crucified on the cross, do you really believe that Jesus is alive again in your life?

An empty tomb is replaced with the Risen Christ, but each one of us needs to see that the stone is rolled away. We need to believe that stone is not blocking our hearts to the love of Jesus in our lives. Our task is to open the door or roll away the stone that prevents us from experiencing life to the fullest.

Jesus wants us to experience the resurrection.

Sometimes we are the ones who remain in the tomb. We all have tombs in our lives. Sometimes we sit in the dark tomb and cannot see the light. We experience grief and death. That grief may be the unwelcome news of health problem, like cancer, or the death of a loved one, or the loss of a relationship, or an unfulfilled dream. Sometimes we do not have the energy or willingness to roll the stone away in our own lives and it is easier to stay in the dark tomb of despair or discouragement.

How can we roll the stone away by ourselves? We need to understand that we are not alone in the feeling of despair and hopelessness. When you are ready to let go of the stone, the Spirit helps beyond our understanding.

Remember the experience of Good Friday comes before the dawn of Easter hope.

To believe in the resurrection means that we let go of the pain and grief, even gradually. . It also means that we *open our eyes* to see the resurrection through faith!

Robert Thompson's book [A Voluptuous God](#), opened my eyes to understand the Resurrection in a wonderful new way.

“Stories of great signs and wonders always point to invisible truths beyond the questionable facts. Thompson writes: “ I do not know whether Jesus was literally raised from the dead. I did not see or experience it. Maybe it happened the way the stories say,

maybe it wasn't like that at all. But the story itself provides a clue about the essence of life.”

Martin Copenhaver writes: “What we proclaim at Easter is too mighty to be encompassed by certainty, too wonderful to be found only within the borders of our imagination.

Is the Resurrection a fact of history or the eternal truth of human experience?

Over the past millennia the story of Easter has been handed to us as scripture tells the story, even in with a variety of details. But the real story is more like poetry in motion. There is, after all, much movement in resurrection. Rebirth is hardly static. **New life, new beginnings, new hope abounds.**

What is the essential meaning of resurrection if not dying to one way of life and rising to another?

Resurrection is a truth of life itself not something to be found only in the ancient story of Jesus. Resurrection happens in every moment throughout all of time. Everyone has a resurrection story to tell. When we say goodbye to a person or place we love, a part of us dies. We are reborn to another way of life. When we go through a divorce, lose a friendship, or fail to get a job we want, something in us dies while something else in us rises up. When we change where we live or move into a new relationship, something dies and new opportunities greet us everyday!

How many times have we risen beyond where we were only to live where we are right now? We die hundreds, if not thousands, of deaths before our bodies breathe their last. Jesus was resurrected because resurrection is itself the power of life that is embedded in all of life. Transitions and transformations are woven into the very fabric of the universe. All of our lives are characterized by continuing deaths and resurrections. Winter becomes Spring, spring becomes summer, summer fades to fall. Spring is all about resurrection!! This Shared ministry is in its Spring stage. Just as the gardeners are watching for signs of Spring in the garden, we are looking for signs of new life here. Things are changing and we hope they are growing. It takes a while to live into a new relationship.

I had the joy of presiding at Jan and Bob's wedding yesterday. I offered them lots of good advice for their married life together. I want to suggest these words of wisdom apply to the relationship here too. There is a difference between living together and making a formal commitment before God. You enthusiastically supported the Shared Ministry Agreement last month, and it is very much like a marriage commitment. It is vitally important that you respect this covenant you have made here in the presence of God, and with both congregations You are now **one**, working together in many new ways. This takes work and commitment.

So let me share some wedding words of wisdom.

In my opening comments I say to the family and friends who have gathered:

By our presence we accept responsibility for supporting them in the new relationship as marriage partners. We are called to rejoice in their happiness, to be patient when they make mistakes, to help them in times of trouble, and to remember them in our prayers.

So putting that into the framework of this new relationship, you have a responsibility to support one another, celebrate the good times, be patient when people make mistakes, offer understanding when things get complicated, and always remember each other in your prayers. Pray for this community of faith as it continues to grow together. In this new faith community you are stronger, so that together, you may reach out and become involved in life, in ways you dared not risk alone. If you look at the wall posters you'll see many ideas of what you can do together.

Remember the Love that Jesus showed his friends and taught about was a love from God So let me remind you about the Love referred to in 1st Corinthians chapter 13: 4-8, 13 *Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never ends. And now faith, hope and love abide, these three: and the greatest of these is love.*

Marriage is for us all the vision and the hope of relationships founded on commitment and mutual support, fidelity and love, justice and compassion. Mature people do not go into this marriage commitment with glassy eyed optimism, they realize that is it a new phase of their relationship and they are ready to make the commitment to grow together and enjoy the rich opportunities that are ahead.

I will admit the couple had stars in their eyes, they were very happy. I wish that for you here too. You can have fun together. Be optimistic! Choosing a new name will be fun next week. There is a busy group planning for the new minister.

Who knows what the Spirit has in mind for this community?

There is the hope of resurrection and new life here.

Get involved and help make it happen.

In every moment there are transformations. Like Spring, resurrection awakens us to the eternal flow of life. God is not a supernatural power over us, but the natural power within us that allows us to rise up again and again and again.

God is with us to empower us. Christ is not in the tomb but the risen Christ is here among us. Herein lies our resurrection and our spring. Thanks be to God, for the living Christ among us. Amen