

Live in the Present Moment

John 20: 1-19

It is always amazing to me how the Spirit of God finds us with a word of hope and life when we least expect it. As many of you know, for the last six weeks, we have been spending time with the Tree of Life, contemplating its wisdom, allowing this wisdom to challenge us, inviting it to transform us into the people God created us to be. Over the last six weeks, we have talked about the living light which flows through all creation, how this living light brings healing and wholeness to all. Over the last six weeks, we have gathered around the Tree of Life, embracing its lessons for our faith journey and now on this Easter morning, there is another tree to bring us wisdom for the journey ahead, wisdom which calls us to remember our connection to the Divine as we live in the present moment. On this Easter morning, there is another tree to remind us that life and love will always have the last word.

Let me back up a bit and start from the beginning...Earlier this week, I came upon an article about a certain historic Ceiba Tree in Puerto Rico. This tree has seen it all and been through it all. It is over 400 years old. "This tree has stood tall through Spanish conquest, centuries of land development, invasion, U.S. Navy bombing practice and countless storms. But in 2017, hurricanes Irma and Maria

brought devastation to this particular tree. The high winds stripped off all the leaves, broke most of the smaller branches and cracked larger ones. No one thought the tree survived and now...now two years later, this tree is blooming. This tree is proving to the residents of this island that life finds a way. As the tree bursts with night-blooming clusters of light pink flowers for the first time since the hurricanes, it has become a symbol of hope for the residents of this storm torn island. One resident even saying...that as they look at this tree they are reminded that they can continue, that things may get hard but if we stand strong we can make it.”

Think about that for a moment. What was once thought dead is now reborn. Sounds like an Easter sermon illustration to me!

Now I wish I could take credit for this amazing phenomena because after all, how perfect is the timing of all this. After six weeks of talking about the Tree of Life, about its power to bring healing and wholeness, its power to connect us as people of faith, its power to burst forth in love and light...here is a real life example of it happening now for a battered community. It ties up our Tree of Life theme nicely with its message of no matter how things go, love and light will always find a way. I could not have planned it better myself.

Of course, as I said, as much as I want to take credit for the amazing timing of this phenomena, I know that the rebirth of this historic tree has nothing to do with me. This tree moving from death to life has nothing to do with our theme. In reality, it is just another way I am, that we as people of faith are constantly reminded of our connection to God's presence in the world. This renewal of creation is just one more way I am, that we are as people of faith constantly reminded that the good news of the Gospel is that God does not operate within the limits of only what we can see. Let me say that again, the good news of the Gospel story is that God does not operate within the limits of only what we can see.

For us, as the people of God, as people of faith, the power of the resurrection is this...the resurrection points us in hope to the reality (even if we can't see it), points us in hope to the reality that God really is working to make all things new.

That's the beauty of Easter morning. It reminds us that the resurrection was never limited to that one morning. The resurrection was never a one and done event. For us as people of faith, it was, is and forever will be an experience of new life, an experience of hope, an experience of God's love which greets us, which fills us, which renews us every moment of every single day.

We know this to be true because as people of faith, we have the promise of love and life overcoming the darkness now and forevermore. This is the promise

which sustains us. This is the promise which gives us courage for the journey ahead. This is the promise which strengthens us when it all becomes too much. The gift of Easter morning is that it is a moment of hope. It is a moment of grace. It is a moment which always finds us in ordinary and extraordinary ways. The gift of Easter morning is that it defies all logic and reminds us in so many ways that love and light will always have the last word.

You see, these moments of love and life were not limited to that first Easter morning. These moment of love and life always find us if we open our eyes, open our hearts, open our minds to the presence of God already in our midst. These moments of love and light find us through the laughter of friends as we gather around the table and share our lives with one another. These moments of love and light find us through the beauty of God's creation, beauty which reminds us that the same God who made the stars at night and the mountains standing tall also formed us. These moments of love and light find us through the smiles of children and the wet kisses of our animal best friends. These moments of love and light fill our everyday lives with joy and gratitude. They constantly remind us that God is at work in this world, bringing healing and wholeness, restoring us to the peace of God's Kingdom once more.

For me, this is the greatest lesson of Easter. No matter what the world may say, no matter how dark it may get, no matter how it may appear, even if it looks

like hurt and hate will win, the greatest lesson of Easter is this...no matter what, our God is always there, always working, always surprising us with new life, always bringing healing and wholeness to God's creation once more. Nothing, not death, not darkness, not fear, nor hate, nothing can ever separate us from the grace and love of our God.

And because of this promise...a promise given to us by a God who loves us so much, we can and we do celebrate now and forever as ones who know love and light will always have the last word.

Or let me say it this way...Many of us may have heard of the legend of the Dogwood Tree. You know the story which tells us that at the time of the Crucifixion the Dogwood was the size of the oak and other forest trees. So firm and strong was the tree that it was chosen as the timber of the cross. To be used for such a cruel purpose greatly distressed the tree, and Jesus, nailed upon it, sensed this, and in his gentle pity for all sorrow and suffering said to it: "Because of your regret and pity for my suffering, never again shall the Dogwood tree grow large enough to be used as a cross. Henceforth it shall be slender, bent and twisted and its blossoms shall be in the form of a cross. Two long and two short petals, and in the center of the outer edge of each petal there will be nail prints brown with rust. In the center of the flower will be a crown of thorns and all who see it will remember."

Many of us may have heard the legend of the Dogwood and its connection to the Easter story but did you know that there is another tree also connected with the Easter story? The story goes that on the first Easter morning, Mary came to the garden, only to discover the tomb was empty. She hurried back to tell the other disciples. They came running at the news but soon left in disbelief. Only Mary stayed. She encountered a man whom she thought was a gardener but in reality it was Jesus.

This supposed gardener asked “Women why are you weeping?” to which Mary replied, “Where have you taken my Lord?” After this question, Jesus simply her by name and immediately Mary knew...She knew it was Jesus standing before her, “full of life. In that moment Mary knew that Jesus had returned and that everything had changed.

On that Sunday morning, all those years ago, when the sun rose and the earth tremble with joy beneath her, the third tree knew that God’s love had changed everything. And every time people thought of the third tree, they would think of God.

All because Jesus had transformed the cross, a tree of death and despair into the Tree of Life, forever reminding us that love and light will always have the last word. Amen.