

Order of Worship

Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021

WELCOME

Hello God, thank you for this day.

It's 9:03 and we need your help.

Guide us by your Holy Spirit to reach new people,

Connect us all through Christ's love, and

Empower us to love and serve others. Amen.

PRELUDE *Marcia di Festa* P. Cattaneo

CALL TO WORSHIP Psalm 118:14-24 UMH 839

HYMN 302 *Christ the Lord Is Risen Today* EASTER HYMN

SCRIPTURE Acts 10:34-43

PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

HYMN 314 *In the Garden* GARDEN

SCRIPTURE John 20:1-18

MESSAGE Rev. Rebecca Voss

GENEROSITY, INVITATIONS and CELEBRATIONS

HYMN 308 *Thine Be the Glory* JUDAS MACCABEUS

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE *Voluntary in C* J. Stanley

PRAYER CORNER

Please call the church office at 715-842-2201 or email Pastor Rebecca at rebecca@fumcwausau.org if you would like to be prayed for or if you'd like to join a team of people who pray for the people of our church and community.

“If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.” These words of wisdom were repeated by my parents when I was growing up. I would hear some exciting news that would give near-instant wealth or success, and my hopes and excitement would rise. I invested my time and money, but the promised outcome never quite materialized. After several times of learning my lesson the hard way, I became suspicious of good news promising the latest and greatest.

However, we do often wish for more good news than bad news. Many of us dread turning on the news or reading current events because it can be so depressing and overwhelming. Strangely, news outlets find themselves in a pickle. If their “good news” stories increase much beyond 10% of their coverage, they often lose 2/3 of their audience. A neuroscientist named Rick Hansen explained, “The brain is like Velcro for negative experiences and Teflon for positives ones.” This is not good news for good news!

On the first Easter morning, Mary came to the tomb while it was still dark and saw the stone was rolled away. We now interpret this as “good news”, but for her and anyone else in that day, this sight was a likely sign of bad news. It wasn’t uncommon for grave robbers to steal bodies and anything that may have been buried with them. She frantically ran to tell Simon Peter and John, saying, “*They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.*” (John 20:2).

Before we think about this frightening news, let’s pause to consider the audience. Mary chose to go to two very different disciples. Simon Peter had denied knowing Jesus three times just a few days before, and went into hiding, feeling ashamed for his failure to stand up for Jesus. Contrast that with John, who had stood faithfully at the foot of the cross, promising to take care of Jesus’ mother Mary as if she was his own mother. This reminds us that God’s Good News is there for both those who feel like failures as well as for those who think they’ve done their best to be faithful.

I chuckle every time I read the phrase, “*the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved*” (v. 2). This is the apostle John writing about himself. Not only does John frequently remind everyone that he is the “one whom Jesus loved”, but also that he ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first (v. 4). John peeked in and noticed the linen wrappings lying there, but he was too afraid to go inside.

When Simon Peter finally and breathlessly arrived, the cowardice of his faith a few days before was replaced by a bold curiosity. He stepped inside and noticed something peculiar – not only were the linen wrappings left behind, but they were neatly folded. This was a sign that Jesus’ body had not been stolen. Linen fabric was valuable and would have been taken with his body. If the body had been stolen and the tomb raiders had to hastily leave behind the linens, they never would have taken the time to carefully fold them.

Given this strange evidence, John musters up enough courage to step inside the tomb. It says, *“He saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.”* (vs. 8-9). In this case, John isn’t yet believing the fact - and good news - that Jesus’ body is gone because he was resurrected. He is believing Mary’s misguided “fake news” that Jesus’ body was stolen. None of them understood the scripture about the Messiah rising from the dead, so John and Peter went back to their homes with heavy hearts. *“But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.”* The bad news of Jesus’ missing body was starting to move from shock and denial to pain and anger. Who would do such a thing? Did they know and care about how life-changing Jesus had been to her and countless others?

Jesus had warned his disciples there would be days like this. In John 16:20 he said, *“Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn...you will have pain but it will turn into joy.”* He then uses the analogy of a woman in painful childbirth, who eventually experiences great joy when holding her newborn that makes the pain worth it. *“You have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”* (John 16:22)

Mary doesn’t see Jesus or have that joy quite yet. The Velcro quality of this painful experience is sticking to her like porcupine quills on a curious dog. *“She saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying... They said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’”* Mary is too distraught to even care she is surrounded by angels as she laments, *“They’ve taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”* (vs. 12-13). After Mary explains the bad news to the angels, *“she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.”* (v. 14). Sometimes Good News is right under our nose, but we don’t recognize it when we’re blinded by fear and grief.

Then the Primary Source of Good News asks a question for all of us, *“Why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?”* (v.15). Mary assumed he was nothing more than a meddling gardener. Did this gardener hide Jesus’ body? *“Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”* (v. 15).

There are plenty of things to grieve and get upset about in life. There are many worthy things to seek and work for. Oftentimes, our areas of passion and sense of purpose are born from a source of grief or injustice. God comes to us in our overwhelming pain, often before we even recognize God’s presence with us, and begins the process of transforming bad news into truly Good News.

The turning point from bad news to the best news ever happened with a single word from Jesus: *“Mary!”* (v.16). It’s a powerful echo of Jesus explaining to his followers that he *“calls his sheep by name and leads them out.”* (John 10:3). He’s leading Mary out of the rut of being stuck in the bad news of his death and possibly stolen body, and into the Good News of death itself being defeated.

I imagine Jesus gets the biggest and tightest hug ever from Mary. Jesus cautions her, *“Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father.”* (v. 17). It might seem like Jesus is giving her the cold shoulder. After searching for his body in the midst of profound grief and dismay, who wouldn’t cling to the one they thought they had lost first to death and then to thieves? Jesus explains to Mary that she cannot stay with him physically, since though he is risen from the dead, he will soon ascend to the Father. He calls Mary to be the first preacher and “apostle to the apostles”: *“Go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to the Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”* (v. 17)

“Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her.” (v. 18) Mary finally understood and shared the Good News that Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection opens up the arms of God’s love to a relationship with us. Jesus welcomes both failing and faithful disciples, like Peter and John. Jesus calls every gender in every language and culture to know, go, and tell the Good News. The Good News is that Jesus can hug more than one of us at a time – the whole world is now welcomed into the embrace of Grace! The Risen Christ transforms bad and fake news and calls us to hear and share the Good News of God’s amazing grace and eternal love! Amen.