

“Bringing our Lives to Easter”

Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 4/21/19
At Crossroads United Methodist Church
Waunakee, WI

Life never stays the same. Every morning I look into the mirror and it seems as though I'm not quite the same person as the night before. Sometimes I'm absolutely shocked by who's looking back at me. We all recognize that physical change is one of the few constants that are absolutely reliable.

John Updike has been a favorite author of mine for years. He wrote this: “We die, not only physically, but emotionally and spiritually as change seizes us by the scruff of the neck and drags us forward into another life. We are not here simply to exist. We are here in order to become. It is the essence of the creative process; it is in the deepest nature of things.”

Well, since I have the opportunity let me ask a personal question: just what are you becoming?

This Easter morning, you have brought your life in here with you. The whole of it. Maybe you didn't intend to, but I suspect you were unable to leave any bit of it behind. And I also suspect that some part of you wanted very much to hear once more the remarkable refrain of hope that the Creator of all things sings to us this day...

Now friends, I don't know the details of your individual stories, of course, but I do know they fall within the range of human living and all the variations of suffering, success and failure we could name. I know that from time to time fear stalks you and I know you don't like to admit that. But I also know there is nothing that could be reported by anyone here that falls beyond the range of redemptive hope. And I imagine that all of us have some pretty bad things that's happened in our lives.

Always remember that the good news of Easter emerges from the ashes of Good Friday. A magnificent triumph is born in the midst of rock-bottom failure. The Christ who was raised has nail prints in his hands, and a deep scar in his side. Put to death for treason. Abandoned by his friends. This guy who seems to be the marked man, is the one that was raised.

Friends, don't leave here today without contemplating what that means, because it has something to do with who and what you are becoming, with what God intends for you, what it means to be fully human and fully alive.

Consider Jesus' friend, Peter, the rock. The one upon whom it was said Jesus would build the church; Jesus' right hand man. He's the one we read about on Good Friday who, at the arrest of Jesus, denied he ever knew him. His best friend and mentor, at the time of greatest need, Peter deserts and lies about their association. Some friend. Some rock.

But then, that's just the point. Resurrection hope is not Easter candy we find once a year. It isn't God's big marketing campaign like the slick ads one sees for the current political candidates. Instead, it takes the raw material of our lives and transforms it into something we couldn't, or wouldn't, have imagined. This is the source of the meaning of the concept of transcendence.

Now, I have my good days, like Peter. But I have my bad ones, too, also like Peter. That's part of my life's story that I've been writing all these years.

And I'm thinking that Peter was carrying a whole lot of baggage when he entered the tomb on that first Easter. He couldn't leave his fear and betrayal home with his fishing nets. It came right along with him as he ran to see for himself. The news was either horrible, or unbelievable, but he had to see for himself.

And I imagine he set all his baggage down in the tomb in order to examine the linen cloths. And then in bewilderment I imagine he forgot to pick it back up when he left--because he was overwhelmed with hope instead. The fear and betrayal was left lying on the floor of the tomb.

“Bringing our Lives to Easter”

And I'm thinking that if we didn't bring our heavy excess baggage in here with us this morning so as to leave it on the floor we wouldn't be able to take hope back out with us. We'd miss the opportunity of our becoming what was intended from the beginning. Think of this place like a baggage swap.

If we do this, we learn that resurrection isn't something we attend to once a year. It's something we live; it's something we become. Every time a father hugs his son resurrection spirit is present. Every time genuine forgiveness happens, resurrection hope is there. Every time someone manages to put down the bottle, or holds fast in the midst of very great adversity, finds courage in the face of death, when families reconcile—in all of these resurrection is afoot.

Even in the midst of a terrible tragedy or failure, I tell you, God will still have the day. When a whole church takes on the character of Christ in its striving to love God and neighbor, breaking down barriers of exclusion, extending hands to the hungry, thirsty, and naked, the spirit of resurrection is taking hold.

Where is the source of this transforming hope?

In the story of a person who was himself abandoned by everyone—his friends, his religion, his government—and sentenced to a brutal death on trumped up charges. For all intents and purposes, he was a lost cause! This was the human experience!

Jesus' hands were stretched out and pierced and he died in shame. But those outstretched arms were shown to be the very embrace of God.

When you came today you brought your heartache, your grief; all your difficulties. You brought your relationships, your dreams and expectations. You brought your jobs, your families, your cares, your doubts and confusion, and your betrayals.

You brought the whole world in with you. The whole blessed thing. And that's all to the good. It all belongs in here—every bit of it. So that when you leave you can take something back out you may not have expected would leave with you today...it sounds incredible, but you can take resurrection home with you! New Life! Yours for the taking! Yours for the living!