

Easter Sunday at Brentwood Presbyterian

Why Are You Crying?

**April 25, 2011
Palm Sunday**

**Psalm 114 & John 20:1-18
(Hymns –243, 248, 249, 258)**

The Easter story is punctuated and bookended
with weeping and crying.
John says that Mary Magdalene cried
outside the empty tomb,
thinking that grave robbers must have taken away the body.
Then she saw the angels,
then Jesus.

The initial shock and pain gradually turned to amazement and delight.
I can't imagine her tears of sorrow not turning into tears of joy.

Nor can I imagine the stories of encountering the resurrected Jesus
being told over and over again without those tears of joy.
Their tears would have arisen from deep within,
from that place in all of them
where the blessed assurance of knowing that God is still with them,
triumphant over everything everyone tried to do to separate them from God,
was steadfastly lodged.
Those tears of joy would have arisen from the depths of their souls,
where Jesus Christ is known by faith
and fuels our flourishing with an everlasting love.

To share these tears of joy this Easter,
almost two thousand years after the events that John recorded,
takes an act of faith on our part,
a response of gratitude to the blessed assurance
that takes possession of our souls
when we believe that God redeemed the world in Jesus Christ.

John makes an interesting comment in his story
about the impact of the experience of the empty tomb
on "the other disciple."
He was faster than Peter and reached the tomb first.
He looked in, saw the linens, but refused to enter the tomb.
Peter, on the other hand, went straight in.

Then the other disciple did the same.
And John writes:

*He saw and believed.
(They still did not understand the scripture
which said that he must rise from death.)
Then the disciples went back home.
(John 20:8b-10)*

There is an important Christian insight
embedded in these few words.

Faith comes first,
then understanding.
We are loved into faith by God's redeeming action on our behalf.
We are given a blessed assurance that God is with us and for us,
without any conditions or limitations.
We are embraced by the full power of divine love,
seen most clearly in the unprecedented and unrepeated
self-sacrifice of God in the flesh in Jesus Christ.
Our response to that redemption,
initiated by God alone and offered as free gift to all,
is a leap of faith that is also a leaping in the joy of faith.

We do not come to this faith through rational certainty.
Reason and intellect help us make sense of it,
but only after we realize that we have been grasped by it,
after we surrender to the blessed assurance of the Holy Spirit
that we are indeed beloved friends of God.
That assurance, and that assurance alone,
is the satisfaction of all of our human desires and aspirations
for the authentic happiness that brings tears of joy.

Thomas Keating is a Cisterian monk
who is one of the leading proponents of Centering Prayer.
In a lecture at the Harvard Divinity School,
published in a little book called *The Human Condition*,
he points out that human beings were designed for
"unlimited happiness, the enjoyment of all truth,
and love without end." (p.10)
We flourish in those qualities of life
through an ever-deepening intimacy with God.
That is what the Christian faith is all about.
It is a journey, a way into,
An ever-more deeply satisfying relationship with
the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of life in all its fullness.

Where does that act or leap of faith,
that heart-felt act of courage and that unbounded leap of joy,
lead us in this world that seems filled to overflowing
with so many tears of fear and sorrow?

It leads us to three conditions,
three places of flourishing,
in which we human beings
thrive as was intended by God in our creation.

The first is a place of belonging and connection.
First and foremost, that connection is with God,
with the divine source and solace of abundant life.

Remember when Cindy Johal
was doing her research among us
on trust, collaboration, and community.

She discovered the foundation for all of these among us
was the sense of welcome and belonging people experienced here.

That quality of life, that strength for the journey,
is present because Jesus Christ is with us.

Indeed, it is his hospitality that we offer.

There is no stronger place from which to be fully human
than from the place of being loved by
and being friends with God in Jesus Christ.

From that place of blessed assurance all of life makes new sense.

The second place is one of hope and possibility.

The ills of this world seem overwhelming
when viewed from the perspective of the solitary individual.

They take on a different feel

when viewed from the perspective of a member
of the great communion of saints,

of God's beloved friends united in being a blessing to this hurting world.

God's unquenchable love opens up possibilities and generates hope.

God's words to Moses at the burning bush
resonate with blessed assurance in our souls.

I will be who I will be

in order create a people to help me fulfill my covenant with Abraham
of blessing all nations.

And the third place is one of energy and proactivity.

With God's blessed assurance

comes the enlivening energy of the Holy Spirit,
present with us in every breath we take,

in every life-giving inspiration and aspiration we experience.

This is the intimacy of God
that nourishes and energizes every cell in our bodies
in order to bring us to the full realization and enjoyment of
happiness, truth, and love.

In these three places of flourishing -
belonging, hope, and energy -
where we find real intimacy with the God
who overcame death for us in Jesus Christ,
our tears of fear are transformed into tears of joy.
We are crying for the right reasons,
delighting in the laughter after sadness,
in the light when night has fled.

May that blessed assurance of this Easter morning
be with you forever.

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