

Easter 2020
Matthew 28:1-11
Rev. Shannon A White
Wilton Presbyterian Church
April 12, 2020

Maybe you're asking, "How do we celebrate the gift of resurrection and new life, when there are people dying all around us ~~ even close friends, beloveds? Where is the hope?"

Where is the hope when people are not able to soothe their elderly relatives isolated in nursing homes?

Where is the hope when loved ones are not able to gather for funerals of those who have died?

Where is the hope when people are having to postpone joyful family gatherings such as weddings and birthdays?

Where is the hope when every bit of pride has been stripped away, and you find yourself having to go to the local food bank since having been furloughed or laid off?

Where is the hope for small business owners who struggle in normal times with low profit margins and don't see the light at the end of the tunnel and may fall out of existence?

Where is the hope?

Perhaps, as in no other way in our lifetime, we are seeing that no human effort can save us. All those years ago, the cries during Palm Sunday from the crowds... Hosanna!! Seem long distant today. Hosanna doesn't mean "praise"... it means SAVE US. The people were shouting "Save us!" Then a week later they were faced with the answer to that plea they probably didn't expect... Jesus' death.

How could Jesus' death have saved them? How can Jesus' death save us at this time?

Friends... **the message of Easter, is that death is not the end of the story...** the story isn't over yet... death is NEVER the final word. God's great love for you and for me, for every person you know and don't know... God's love for each of us, for humanity and for our earth... is stronger than the power of death. **Life and love will burst forth in the most unexpected ways.**

I sobbed as I wrote those words in preparation for this sermon... I needed to hear them too. I needed to write them and let them well up within me and overtake me. And right at that moment, a ray of sun burst through my kitchen window just then and shone on my face.

You might well ask: What evidence do you have of this promise? How do we know it is true? How do we believe in Resurrection love and life in such a time as this ~~ during the coronavirus?

From the beginning of time... even to this day... God is reaching out and has always reached out to us. From the story of creation in Genesis 1 where God reached out to create something new... to the story of the Resurrection where God reached out to make a connection with the women at the tomb ~~ God is reaching out and has always reached out to be in relationship with humanity.

This is a time, when all of the distraction has been stripped away, to be open to that reality and to notice it. God is reaching out to all of us... to you and to me... but it doesn't stop there... it can't stop there.

God uses us, too... to reach out and be the human face of incarnate love, justice, peace and connection. Like the mother and children who showed up at Wilton Meadows nursing home this week walking outside of the windows of the residents who felt isolated and lonely inside; The

daughter of one of those residents wrote on Wilton's FB page, "My mom is a resident, under quarantine in her room and was so thrilled to see these children. She turned 89 on March 21, no party because no visitors are allowed. Mom was a 1st grade teacher for 20+ years in Westport. Seeing young children brings her so much joy!

God is using us as hundreds of people here in town and across the country who are making protective gear for those heroes battling on the frontlines in hospitals around the country.

The writer C.S. Lewis once said, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because **by it I see everything else.**"

Our faith based in Resurrection... shifts our perspective and our actions....

When I was a young adult, my mother introduced me to the book ***The Hiding Place*** by Corrie Ten Boom. I wonder if you read it? It's the true story about a woman who was born in 1892 to a working-class family in Amsterdam, Netherlands. Her father was a watchmaker, and she eventually became the first female watchmaker in her country. The Ten Booms were people of deep and enduring faith and put their faith into action by offering shelter, food and money to people in need. As a young woman, Corrie established a teen youth club which taught girls' religious education and classes in the performing arts as well as arts and crafts. She also worked with those living with mental disabilities.

In 1940, the Germans invaded the Netherlands. As part of their occupation, Corrie's youth club was banned. Then one day, a well-dressed woman appeared at the ten Boom's door asking if they would take her in and hide her. She was Jewish. Without hesitation, Casper Ten Boom (Corrie's father) said, "God's people are always welcome." Their home became "The Hiding Place." Corrie and her sister Betsie took

charge and opened their home to Jewish and Gentile refugees who were members of the resistance movement, and as a result they were sought after by the Gestapo and its Dutch counterpart.

On February 28, 1944, someone told the Nazis about the ten Booms' work; that day the Nazis arrested the entire ten Boom family along with some others who were visiting the house that day. They were sent to a prison camp. Those who were hidden were not discovered.

Corrie and Betsie were sent to several more camps before ending up at the notorious Ravensbrück concentration camp, a women's labor camp in Germany. There, they held worship services after the hard days at work by using a Bible that they had managed to smuggle in. Betsie's health deteriorated, and she died in 1944 at the age of 59 after 11 months in captivity. Before she died, she told Corrie, "There is no pit so deep that He [God] is not deeper still." Fifteen days later, Corrie was released. Afterwards, she was told that her release was because of a clerical error and that a week later, all the women in her age group had been sent to the gas chambers.

Corrie returned home in the midst of the winter when hunger was rampant. She still opened her doors to the mentally disabled who were in hiding for fear of execution.

After all of the suffering she endured at the hands of her captors, after the war, Corrie set up a shelter which housed those who had collaborated with the Germans during the war. She later even returned and met with two German soldiers who had been particularly cruel to her sister and forgave them.

Even in the most difficult times we can imagine, God reaches out to us, loving and healing us, so that we can reach out to others with a loving and healing hand.

If there was ever a time to believe in resurrection love... it's now. In these days. God is here, reaching into our collective souls and saying... just as the scripture says the angel told the two Marys at the tomb... "Don't be afraid... I know that you are looking for Jesus, but he is not here, he has been raised." Go, tell and be of service to others...

May it be so, Alleluia! Amen ~~