

Resurrection Ingredients

Easter Sunday, April 4, 2010

John 20:1-18

Whitefish UMC

- † Something was missing, and my heart fell with a thud. Around me were gathered our 10-year old son, his two friends, and my husband Tom, holding a neighbor's fussy baby in his arms. With expectant faces, we waited for the mixture in the bowl to rise. But nothing happened. Instead of warm, yeasty, puffy pizza dough, we had a flat, cold, gluey mess.
- † “We’ll make homemade pizza—it will be fun!” I had said, hopefully. But the truth was, I knew I was a failure at making anything that involved yeast. But friends had reassured me that pizza dough was easy—fail-proof—and so I tried one more time. But that night’s fiasco resulted in calling the pizza delivery man instead.
- † People tell me that what’s missing from my efforts at bread or dough that has yeast in it is just the right amount of warmth—not too much, not too little—for the yeast to work. And maybe that’s it. But what does my failure at bread have to do with Easter?
- † This Easter morning, my defeat at bread-making offers us an important message. Without the key ingredients, life, like dough, can be flat, cold, and sticky. And what are those key ingredients? The hope, promise, and joy of Jesus’ resurrection.

- † We tend to think of the Easter message as a gift for the end of life. But really, I think we need it just as much right now, because as many of us know, what feels like death can come long before the end of life.
- † How many people do we know who are walking around physically alive but dead in spirit? Maybe you are one of them, for you know how easily life can beat you down. It's like the story of the little boy with his head in his hands staring at his school book saying, "I wish my arithmetic was done and that I was married and dead."
- † A college professor was asked to teach Sunday school to a group of children in a homeless shelter. One of the little girls he taught was bright and eager, and she loved to read. She didn't know who her father was, and her mother was a drug addict, but somehow this little girl had survived the mean streets of her life for ten years.
- † The Sunday school class was a new thing for her, and the professor taught the lesson, which was the story of Jesus as a twelve-year old in the temple. And when the little girl said, "That's a *good* story!" and the professor saw her interest in Sunday school, he asked her if she liked stories. She said, "I love stories, happy stories!"
- † So he sent her home with a children's Bible, and he encouraged her to read ahead, and she did. And the very next week, when the professor came to the shelter, young Sophie was waiting for him, and as soon as she saw him, she burst into tears. She clutched the Bible she had been given, and cried to her teacher, the professor, "They killed him! They killed him! They killed him! He was so good, but they killed him."
- † She had read right up to where Jesus was crucified, right up to the words, "It is finished...right up to the tomb, but no further, for she couldn't bear to go on. Ten-year-old Sophie knew the world, she knew that it is a hard world,

she knew from her short life, from all the times of abandonment and all the times of fear and all the times of hunger and all the times of abuse, that bad things just keep on coming.

† “They did bad things to him...the bad men did, and then they killed him...” she said to the professor. I don’t like this story...it is NOT a happy story anymore!” And she handed him the Bible and started to leave.

† You can understand, can’t you? She’d never heard the story before, not even once! Sophie read about this kind, compassionate Jesus, who healed the sick, loved those who others considered unlovable, and welcomed the strangers. She read the stories of Jesus, and she had hope, and in the midst of her short, hard life, that hope was a wonderful gift.

† But her hopes were dashed when the bad guys won, when they arrested Jesus, when they hurt him, lied about him, betrayed him, laughed at him, and then killed him cruelly. No wonder she gave the Bible back to her teacher.

† I imagine that Mary Magdalene felt a lot like Sophie felt hundreds of years later, when Mary entered the garden where Jesus lay buried in the tomb (or so she thought) that first Easter morning. Overcome with grief, Mary went to the tomb when it was still dark. She found the stone rolled away and Jesus’ body gone.

† Weeping, she looked inside the tomb and saw two angels. “Woman, why are you weeping?” they ask, and what an irritating question that must have been. “They have taken away my Lord,” Mary said, “and I do not know where they have laid him.”

† Just then, she turned around and Jesus was standing there. But she didn’t recognize him. “Woman, why are you crying?” “Sir,” Mary said, really annoyed now, “if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid

him, and I will take him away.” And then Jesus called her by name.

“Mary,” Jesus said.

- † And the moment he said her name, Mary realized that this stranger standing before her was the risen Christ. “Rabbouni,” “Teacher,” she exclaimed with joy. And Mary recognized the hope, the promise, the joy that had been missing since they had crucified her Lord.
- † Mary remembered, once again, the missing ingredients that she had lost in those three dark days. And so must we remember and reclaim those resurrection ingredients, not only today, Easter day, but each day of our lives, and even unto death.
- † My friend Peter Perry, pastor of the United Methodist church in Resurrection Bay at Seward, Alaska, retells a parable by Max Lucado about the dark...he tells of the coming of fire to a clan of people who live deep in a dark cave....

Long ago, or maybe not so long ago, there was a tribe in a dark, cold cavern. The cave dwellers would huddle together and cry against the chill. Loud and long they wailed. It was all they did. It was all they knew to do. The sounds in the cave were mournful, but the people didn't know it, for they had never known joy. The spirit in the cave was death, but the people didn't know it, for they had never known life.

But then, one day, they heard a different voice. “I have heard your cries,” it announced. “I have felt your chill and seen your darkness. I have come to help.”

The cave people grew quiet. They had never heard this voice. Hope sounded strange to their ears. “How can we know you have come to help?”

“Trust me,” he answered. “I have what you need.”

The cave people peered through the darkness at the figure of the stranger. He was stacking something, then stooping and stacking more.

“What are you doing?” one cried, nervous.

The stranger didn’t answer.

“What are you making?” one shouted even louder.

Still no response.

“Tell us!” demanded a third.

The visitor stood and spoke in the direction of the voices. “I have what you need.” With that he turned to the pile at his feet and lit it. Wood ignited, flames erupted, and light filled the cavern.

The cave people turned away in fear. “Put it out!” they cried. “It hurts to see it.”

“Light always hurts before it helps,” he answered. “Step closer. The pain will soon pass.”

“Not I,” declared a voice.

“Nor I,” agreed a second.

“Only a fool would risk exposing his eyes to such light.”

The stranger stood next to the fire. “Would you prefer the darkness? Would you prefer the cold? Don’t consult your fears. Take a step of faith.”

For a long time no one spoke. The people hovered in groups covering their eyes. The fire builder stood next to the fire. "It's warm here," he invited.

"He's right," one from behind him announced. "It's warmer." The stranger turned and saw a figure slowly stepping toward the fire. "I can open my eyes now," she proclaimed. "I can see."

"Come closer," invited the fire builder.

She did. She stepped into the ring of light.

"It's so warm!" she extended her hands and sighed as her chill began to pass.

"Come, everyone! Feel the warmth," she invited.

"Silence, woman!" cried one of the cave dwellers. "Dare you lead us into your folly? Leave us. Leave us and take your light with you."

She turned to the stranger. "Why won't they come?"

"They choose the chill, for though it's cold, it's what they know. They'd rather be cold than change."

"And live in the dark?"

"And live in the dark."

The now-warm woman stood silent, looking first at the dark, then at the man.

"Will you leave the fire?" he asked.

She paused, then answered, “I cannot. I cannot bear the cold.” Then she spoke again. “But nor can I bear the thought of my people in darkness.”

“You don’t have to,” he responded, reaching into the fire and removing a stick. “Carry this to your people. Tell them the light is here, and the light is warm. Tell them the light is for all who desire it.”

And so she took the small flame and stepped into the shadows.

- † This Easter morning, the risen Christ asks us to carry the light of resurrection into a cold, dark, but also beautiful and wonderful world. It’s what’s missing in a time of violence, fear, and despair for many. It’s the missing warmth—just the right amount—that’s needed for the bread of heaven that we need to rise.
- † Down at the homeless shelter, Sophie took several steps toward the door, the tears still flowing down her cheeks... and the professor said, “Wait. Sophie, wait.” “Why? He’s dead! They killed him. They kill everything... everything that dreams... everything that believes... everything that hopes... they kill it... they always kill it.”
- † “No, Sophie. God isn’t done yet.” And he stepped to her and pushed the Bible back into her young hands... “Read some more... the story isn’t over... God isn’t done yet!”
- † Neither is God finished with our lives. The risen Christ, by the power of God’s Spirit calls us to offer resurrection ingredients of hope, promise, and joy to each other, and to ourselves. Will you accept this gift and pass it on?
- † Christ is risen. *Christ is risen indeed.* Amen.