

The Gift of Easter: Another Chance

Matthew 28:1-10

Churches around the world are using this day to get their message of hope, resurrection and faith to their communities. The message is tailored for the audience they are trying to reach. For example, this congregation has a special calling to a commuter audience. Many of us would probably like to partner with this congregation. And then there are some messages that would play very differently in different congregations. For example, can you imagine this sermon being preached here? I imagine my listeners would get a very different gospel message that day.

Throughout the season of Lent we have been on a journey together as a community of faith. We looked at the ways our time of introspection, meditation and prayer could reveal gifts to us that easily could have been missed in the normal course of life. The gifts of call, freedom, compassion, insight and patience are not often found in the routine of life. It seems we have to seek them out – watch for evidence of their presence and intentionally nurture their growth.

We have noted that there is a cost to living lives of faith. It changes us, transforms our understanding and causes us to be open to new possibilities. With each revelation comes an opportunity for growth. To get to that new life, that new possibility, that Easter experience, we have to pass through Good Friday.

Good Friday is behind us for the moment. It will come again. **It always does.** But for now, it is over and here we are on that resurrection morning – that great “gettin’ up morning” – ready for another chance.

When I first pondered this biblical story for today I thought about calling this sermon, “The Gift of Easter: A Second Chance.” Then I began to think about all the experiences we have endured during our Lenten journey and it seemed to me that second chances aren’t the point. We need sixth, twentieth and ninety-first chances. How many times had

Jesus taught the disciples about the power of resurrection? How many times did it take before something began to sink in that this was a radically different way of being in the world? We know this Easter morning was not their second chance. They were way beyond that. But it was another chance.

How many times should I forgive someone who wrongs me? That was a question asked of Jesus. We remember the answer, don't we? It wasn't once. It wasn't even twice. It was seventy times seven. The answer was meant to put us back on our heels and to consider the importance and consequences of forgiveness. Have you ever had to forgive someone who genuinely hurt you or someone you loved? It's difficult. Another chance isn't something that is given lightly. We request the opportunity with our sincerity, commitment and contrition. We receive it when we show that we really care about what is happening and we really care about the relationship that has been damaged. We receive it when we are able to meet each other, person to person – soul to soul, heart to heart – instead of as other, enemy or scoundrel. And we receive it when we look at the alternative to not offering another chance – i.e. staying stuck in a damaged place with no hope of restoration – no hope of healing.

Change is the only thing you can count on for being consistent. This last week at the Board meeting, the Board regretfully accepted the resignation of Becky Facer from the Board. Most of us are aware that life can be overwhelming and it has certainly been that way for Becky, Susan and their family the last few months. It was painfully difficult for her to do this because Becky values her commitment to the Board and to the church and we will miss her therapeutic presence at our meetings. She has been a great asset to our work. She wants all of you to be clear that she is not going away. She just needs to manage her time commitments differently. The Board is considering appointing someone to fulfill Becky's term until the next congregational meeting when the congregation will elect a new slate of Board members. If you have suggestions for people you believe have the skills and time to offer their service on the Board, please speak to any Board member. Skill sets that are particularly helpful to the Board's work include legal experience, financial/fundraising background, non-profit experience and policy

development. This is another chance for our governing Board to add a new dimension to the pool of expertise that they bring to the work of All God's Children. The Board needs another chance to draw from your expertise and passion.

Today is Miracle Sunday. We do this every Easter here at All God's Children because what better day to celebrate the miracle of God's presence among us than Easter – the day we celebrate new life, resurrection and another chance. Do you know what the definition of a miracle is? Funk and Wagnall's says "Any wonderful or amazing thing, fact or event." That's a pretty good secular read of the word. A theological understanding of miracle would add "any time the presence of God at work." Recognizing a miracle when it is happening is amazing. It changes you. It inspires you. It elicits gratitude – all the things we look for when we think about our relationship with God.

For the parents and grandparents among us, think about the birth of your child. When you looked into that sweet and messy little face, you knew your life was never going to be the same again, didn't you? That's what a miracle does to us. It helps us see the beautiful, the wonderful, the amazing that is happening right in the messiness of our own hands – right in our lives. And the presence of God says, "You're welcome." (And if we're listening really closely the presence of God also might whisper, **I'll need to remind you of this moment when they're teenagers!**)

I don't know about you but I could use a miracle right about now. There is so much going on in the world that tries to draw our attention to the violent and hateful and cruel and destructive that we need to remember the miraculous is happening all the time. We have to be willing to see it. We have to be willing to put ourselves in a place to participate in it and recognize it as it unfolds.

We have been given an audacious vision and mission. Called by Christ to be a radically inclusive community of faith, healed by God's unrelenting grace and sent in love to share our gifts with the world. What an audacious claim! Do we live up to it all the time? When we

don't it is a painful reminder that we still have work to do. And when it does happen – when the miracle of God's presence touches our misconceptions, heals our woundedness, relieves us of our pain, restores our joy, calls us to unexpected places, frees us to let go of the past, empowers us to share our gifts and challenges us not to give up – when that happens, it is miraculously powerful, transforming, restoring, healing.

This community – this neighborhood, this city, this state – needs All God's Children to be the strongest and most audacious example of our vision and mission that we can be. June Remus received her certification this past week as Food Services Manager which will greatly enhance our ability to expand our food services. From feeding our neighbors to offering a safe, beautiful building to providing powerful worship and music to speaking truth to power, our neighbors need us to be the miracle that gives them hope. There's no experience in the world like being part of a miracle. It will tickle your soul and inspire your life. Our offering today is simply an act of faith to allow the miracle to reveal itself.

I know many of us have come ready to give and I want to thank you for your generosity and your faithfulness to this work. Nothing would be happening in and through All God's Children if all of us weren't generous and faithful. And secondly I want you to ask yourself how tickled do you want your soul to be today? How big of a tickle are you ready for? The miracle is in the messiness of our hands – our lives – just waiting to bless our world.

Sources:

www.homileticonline.com The Experts Were Wrong, April 2011.