

"A Triumphant Trip "
2 Corinthians 2:14-15

April 5, 20015

Easter Sunday (*Sunrise service*)

The congregation I served in Nebraska had a tradition of having its Easter sunrise service, not in the sanctuary, but at a lake in a nearby state park. This was a tradition that, during my tenure, ended up being a good idea which didn't work out, usually because of cold and rainy (sometimes snowy) weather. Yet one year it did work out. Despite the threat of rainy or cold weather, the early morning hour, and other challenges, our trip to the lake for our Easter sunrise service was a success. We had a beautiful day, beautiful weather, a beautiful location, and a beautiful opportunity to worship. **Our trip which had seemed to be destined for failure had ended up a triumph.**

In many ways, **this is like the first Easter trip taken 2,000 years ago by a group of women.** They left their homes, bearing spices and perfume. A sweet aroma accompanied them, but there was nothing sweet about their trip. They were headed out to perform a most sad and repugnant job. **They had to finish anointing the dead body of their friend and teacher, Jesus, for burial.** That was the way of embalming at that time. They took this trip

and performed this task, not because they enjoyed it, but out of love for Him.

They had no inkling of a resurrection, either in expecting it or hoping for it. Their friend was dead and death was the end. Even when they arrived at the tomb and saw that the stone had been rolled away, they just naturally assumed that Jesus' enemies had stolen Jesus' dead body as some sort of final injustice.

It was indeed a tragic trip they took that morning, both for the sadness of the event, but also for the meaning of the event. By dying, they thought, **Jesus proved Himself to be a false prophet** who claimed great things but who was unable to deliver. Jesus was not all that died that Good Friday for them. **The possibility of forgiveness** died with Him. **The kingdom of God died** with Him. Their **hope for eternal life** died with Him. It is no wonder that this was such a tragic trip to the tomb for them. They were emotionally and spiritually defeated.

Yet all of that turned around in a flash. **First, the angels proclaimed to them what had happened:** "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he

said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: `He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee."

And, if this wasn't enough, **Jesus Himself appeared to the women and then to Mary Magdalene.** He showed Himself to them visibly and physically - not merely a dream or the imagination of their grief stricken minds. He was alive again – physically, not just spiritually. He was the same Jesus they had come to know, love, and believe in.

Now, everything was different. Their **joy overflowed.** Not only was it because their friend was alive again (that would be reason enough to be overjoyed), but **they knew for certain that He was who He claimed to be:** the Messiah and the Son of God. In addition, **they knew all of His claims and all of His promises were true.** He was the Lamb of God who had taken away the sin of the world by His sacrifice on the cross. He was the resurrection and the life in whom they could believe and live, even though they would die, and in whom, living and believing, they would never die.

Imagination what a triumphant trip home that was! It was a sweet journey home and not because of the spices which they probably dropped

at the tomb in their excitement. **They went home, not only to rejoice in their own personal joy and happiness, but they went home to share the news** with others as Jesus had commanded them. But I don't think they needed a command to do that, do you? **Their joy motivated them to do that.** As Mary said, "I have seen the Lord!" She told them everything that had happened so that they could share the joy of their teacher being alive and all that that meant for them.

In the same way, **God has led us in "triumphal procession in Christ" today**, as our text says. It has nothing to do with the goodness of the weather or the beauty of the place where we are meeting, whether in a sanctuary or near a lake. It has everything to do with the reason we gather today. **God has led us to witness the resurrection of Jesus Christ by faith. We know that He has risen from the dead and is alive just as He said.**

Although it might not be as shocking for us as it was for the women on that first Easter morning because we have heard the story over and over again, **it is no less joyful for us.** We heard on Good Friday that it was for our sin and the sin of the entire world that Jesus was nailed to the cross.

That it is true. But it is equally true that it was for us and for the entire world that Jesus was raised from the dead. As the Scriptures say,

"God will credit righteousness --for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." (Rom. 4:24 - 5:2)

That says it all. **He was crucified for our sins.** That paid the price to free us from hell. **He was raised to life for our justification.** That was the validation stamped on Jesus' payment for sin. We, who were at war with God due to our sin, **now have peace with Him** through what Jesus accomplished this weekend. And the glorious news is that **we have hope for the future.** The future is not some murky uncertain chain of events over which we can only fear or worry. **Our future is in the glory of God - eternal life.** For, because Jesus lives, we, too, shall live and reign with Him forever in heaven.

Our journey here is indeed a triumphal processional, but **our journey home is as well.** As the women brought sweet smelling spices to the tomb, **we are to be like sweet smelling spices as we leave the empty tomb.** As our text says, "[He] uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those

who are being saved and those who are perishing.” Like a fragrant aroma which wafts through the air to the delight of all, **God uses us and our words to spread the knowledge of Jesus** - His life, death, and resurrection - to all with whom we come in contact.

But **do we really need a command to do that?** When we see so many people living lives filled with guilt and depression, **how can we not help but share with them the news of God's love and His forgiveness for all of their sins through Jesus' death on the cross?** When we see people blindly groping around for meaning in their lives, who have no hope or have misplaced hope in the things of this world, how can we not help but share with them the certain hope of a life with God that has meaning now and has joy and peace for all eternity?

The Easter sunrise service, no matter where it takes place, has always been an exciting joy filled time for me, as I hope it is for you. May the **Lord continue to multiply your joy this day and every day** as you contemplate the meaning of Jesus' resurrection for your life. And **may He use you like a sweet aroma** to spread the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ and His

resurrection from the dead to those still engulfed in the stench of sin and death. Christ is risen! (*He is risen indeed!*) Amen.