

Beverly Dempsey
April 24, 2011
Easter Sunday

"Come Sunday"
Matthew 28: 1-10

For every one of us here, there's something about the Easter story that's causing your heart to pound, your ears to tingle, your throat to tighten, your tears to well, your goosebumps to rise...maybe your nose to itch...For everyone here, there's something about today that's exciting. Maybe we can't put our finger on it, but something extraordinary is happening right here, right now, at First Presbyterian Church in Ramsey. While we haven't experienced a shift in the tectonic plates beneath the great state of New Jersey, we've experienced an unstoppable, irreversible, irresistible change in our world today that could be the emotional rival to a great seismic shock. Life as we know it will never be the same. Maybe you've eaten just one too many pieces of candy and you'll never lose that unwanted pound. Maybe you've heard a bell peal this morning that will ring in your thoughts forever. Maybe a simple compliment to your son or spouse has warmed your heart like never before. Life has changed today, and we're here to celebrate it.

Christ is Risen! He is Risen, indeed. He who was left for dead is alive. It's Easter! We are the many different types of people who've shown up today in witness to the most extraordinary truth. There are those who immediately recognize that God is at the center of it all. We're the Disciples of Faith. As sure as Easter lilies are white, we embrace the great mystery of faith: that Christ has died; Christ has risen; Christ will come again. We are those who believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that all of the sadness of the world will be defeated by the gladness of our Lord. We believe as confidently as Mary and Mary Magdalene felt the earth shake, saw the angel appear and watched the stone be rolled away that the Son of man has been raised as he said he would be raised and he will reign forever and ever. But we are not alone.

Our voices are raised this morning by an equally vital crowd of those standing where few else will stand. We're the Disciples of Love. We might question the how and the why of it all. We might contrast our Jesus is Risen experience against every reality tv show ever aired and still come out wondering if it needed to happen that way at all. But in spite of our questioning of any of the events that've been told, we're here in witness to the truth of the church that supports people in their pain. We bring our contributions to the Center for Food Action each week. We volunteer immediately for an

opportunity to host the homeless. We visit the sick, we write notes to the sad and lonely. We are more than happy to pick up a brother or sister in Christ and bring her to worship any Sunday or a Midweek program of interest. We lovingly sit by the faith-filled ones and we form a powerful contingent of Christ's great church here today. But faithful, loving brothers and sisters, we are not alone.

Our voices are raised this glorious Easter morning with an equally vital crowd. We're sitting alongside the Disciples of Hope. Disciples of Hope are the ones who just don't get all of those concepts that some say are central to our Christian faith. Those ideals just fly right by you as unnecessary, superfluous possibilities that may or may not have impact on our everyday life experience. We say it really doesn't matter. We're getting along just fine, sitting beside our husband or wife or neighbor who says, "It's nice to see you again! Isn't this a lovely service?" We sit here with the rest, not thinking for a minute that you'd ever miss this extraordinary day, regardless of what it's about. Because it's Easter. And things happen on Easter - sacred things, things beyond human apprehension - and we're here in hope that these things are for us, too.

I'm here as a disciple with faith, and love and hope - sometimes feeling one way more than the others - to say that the good news of Jesus Christ is the marvelous truth to which we give witness on this glorious Easter morning like Christians give witness to each and every day is that death has been defeated. That deserves great hallelujahs!

While every single one of us here might not be able to unequivocally affirm that God raises the dead, I do believe that our voices join as one to attest each in our own way, but together to the marvelous truth, that there's no situation that God can't handle. There's no relationship God can't heal. There's no sickness that God can't address. There's no addiction that God can't overcome. There's no economic downslide that God can't upright. There's no joblessness that God can't engage. And as each one of us affirms in her own, unique way that there is a God who can defeat the ravages of the world, great and small, we can cumulatively come to believe that there is a God who can surely resurrect his own from the dead, including our sometimes-deadened life in community with Christ, and our eternal life with Christ and all the great saints for all of life to come.

Just as much as we are sitting here disciples of faith, love and hope, whose cumulative experiences celebrate the transcendent resurrection promise, there are people sitting outside of church walls this grand and glorious Easter day, not feeling worthy or welcome to step inside and experience the magic of it all. There are people all around the world who are don't know even a hint of Faith, have little experience with Love and can barely get their heads around a concept as lofty as Hope. They're the truly suffering souls whom Jesus specifically invites to his table to receive rest and comfort and certainly

grace. They're the ones who most need the transcendent experience from Easter bells and trumpet blasts to call them out of their despair into the brightness of Jesus' resurrection promise. And as much as there are suffering souls sitting outside in search of grace, there are millions of others driving right by, just wondering why the stores are closed! They don't have the slightest idea what Easter really is, outside of a chance to be able to buy pastel colored candy instead of the plain wrappers they're used to, and maybe a chance to get an extra day off from work. It would be hard to say who we might feel sorriest for, except these folks really don't know what they're missing and don't feel any worse for it.

You and I are disciples for whom Christ has been raised. This is the good news, regardless of whether we are disciples of faith, love, or hope, or whether we have too much sadness or ignorance to say that the good news of Jesus Christ is for each one of us. Some of us are unquestioning; some of us act not out of simple faith but pure love; some of us don't quite know what's going on but we hope. We're here from different perspectives, for different reasons, with different needs. And through the glories of this fine Easter day, we've experienced an unstoppable, irreversible, irresistible change in our world today that's the emotional rival to a great seismic shock. Each year, we're reminded that life as we know it will never be the same. Yes, maybe we've eaten just one too many chunks of chocolate and we'll never lose that unwanted pound. Maybe we've just heard a bell peal that will ring in our thoughts forever. Or maybe a little voice greeted you on your way through the door this morning with a simple, "Happy Easter, Mrs. Heym!" and your heart's been warmed like never before. Life has changed today. And in celebration of this awesome, transcendent experience of Christ, the angel tells us to "Go! Go quickly and tell the others." Christ is risen! Shout Hosanna! Where the world is empty and unknowing, Disciples of Faith, share the resurrection story. Where the world is hungry and questioning, Disciples of Hope, "Go! God quickly and tell!" that everyone might come to experience Christ's abounding grace, which is available to all...Dare we hope?¹ Where the world is deep in pain, bring a taste of love unknown from our God who is endless joy and peace and knows no other way.² Disciples of Christ, "Go and tell!" That the ground might shake and tremble for yet another soul this day! "Go and tell!" That the sights and sounds of Easter penetrate the senses of all who question whether Christ is for them, too. And as you Go, may you carry with you the hope, love and faith of our Lord with you, for it is on our way to tell others where Jesus meets us, too.

¹ Urs Von Balthazar, *Dare We Hope*

² Rob Bell, *Love Wins*, page 270.

