

Palisades Presbyterian Church
Easter Sunday, 2008

"The Choice of Easter"
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And it is the idea of choosing that is on my mind this morning:

Choosing to be here and making the choice of being "Easter People."

Those of you who know me, know that I rarely use clichés. So when I talk about "Easter People" it's not like I picked up some new slogan – "We are the Easter People! Rush down today and get your... whatever."

You know, somebody sent me one of those Emails that goes on forever because everyone who gets it forwards it to the next person? Well, the title of this one was, "Happy Egg Day!"

I had no idea what they were talking about. What is an "Egg Day"?

And, I have no idea of "Easter" outside of its theological footprint as the foundation of faith for all Christians.

It is a life-giving truth to be people for whom Easter has meaning, for whom Easter is a central part of their theology and faith. It means more than "just a little" to be Easter People in a Good Friday world.

We all know that Easter is a stunning sort of day. Deeply rooted in the mystery and history of this world and the broader scope of creation.

Your thoughts...

I have always felt, at least as an adult entering a time when I started thinking about my faith instead of just following prescribed directions for faith – I have always felt that all we needed are the stories of the people to know God, to come to understand the choices that we all have made in our lives about how to be faithful, lead an integrated faithful life, to remain steadfast when things go as they sometimes do...

And, in many ways that's the Christian narrative, poignantly told for us over the last several weeks. From the beginning of Lent, we enter a time that is different from all others in the church year, a time that leads us back into the hard to imagine – the execution of Jesus, his condemnation – being judged as unfit (not fitting in?); and less than a week after being welcomed into Jerusalem by a

cheering crowd – he receives the capital punishment of the Romans, scourged and jeered and tortured – the one whose commandment at the Last Supper was to love one another as I loved you – hung on a cross.

It was pretty hard for the disciples to remain steadfast once things started getting really bad. In fact, they scattered – scared, confused, in shock.

And they came back together in the upper room, still hiding, frightened, huddled, lost – and the Spirit of God came to them in Jesus. Comforted them, strengthened them, assured them that they were not forgotten or dismissed, no matter how overcome they might have been by fear or remorse. I've learned not to be too harsh on these disciples.

One of the haunting questions I ask myself when I need to be right-sized a bit is about what choice I might have made. Would I have stayed with Jesus unto the foot of the cross – or would I, too, have run. I know what I would have liked to have done, but the truth is that deep down inside – I've never been able to answer the question. I honestly have no idea what I would have done. That, too, is humbling.

There is a song that we sing around this time of the year called “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord.” It's a lovely hymn and I always enjoy listening to it and singing it in church.

But in response to the title as a question: No, I wasn't – but I am here now. And, what exactly does that mean? What are my choices?

Well, resurrection seems to require that we use our gifts. If the life of Jesus means anything – it has to mean that. Who would have been a better Jesus than Jesus? So that, to me, is the first choice. Be who we are to the fullest we are able.

The next thing is to live in the present, but know that our work transcends any of our plans. Simply, we have no way of knowing the future, but trust that what we do from the place of deeply personal being – has a life beyond ours. I think of this all the time as a teacher. There is little immediate feedback in my work with troubled kids. But I believe that what we do, the combined effort of all those working to support kids, will (may) somewhere down the road help in some way we will never know about.

So choices to live in the present and with others and believe that what we do makes a difference.

OK, fine, but Resurrection, Easter, Faith – remember?

Well, this is the tricky part in a way. The choices here get a bit messier, harder to define. The choice to follow the teachings of Jesus is a choice about a way of living not just some action that is a part of our life.

This is going to mean different things to all of us. It's part of the miracle of Jesus – that each of us can find Jesus in our heart and in our lives in many different ways. Jesus speaks to us as the risen one, just as he did to the disciples and just as God does in so many different ways. So we have to listen...

As far as choices, then, Easter People – well, for me – it is clear, especially at this time of the year, that being Christian is about taking risks in a world that is as likely to judge us “unfit” as it did Jesus. “Love one another as I have loved you” is a risky thing to do, especially if loving others calls for a challenge of the status quo or the disruption of comfort for ourselves and others.

The choice, the challenge of bringing Easter into the Post-Easter world is the same one the disciples faced following Jesus' execution: give each other hope by letting others know they are loved, included, and cared for: feed the hungry, visit those in prison, do not accept homelessness, racism, sexism, agism, gender-bias, or any other inequity or injustice that puts one over the other. Minister to those who are oppressed, lonely, sick, disenfranchised; love and tend to the least among us as we would to our most favored of friends.

And prepare to be humbled, because sometimes all I can do is a little of one of these in the world in which I live and work, in a different shadow of the immensity of need in the world and the little I can do.

And that's where community comes in. This is not the work of the one, cannot be the work of one - but of the many. And, it is not our work to finish. That's another hard piece to put together. “The poor will always be with you” Jesus told his disciples. So don't look to finish the work, don't become discouraged, overwhelmed – reach out, do your part, and trust in God.

Resurrection – my friend and Minister at South Presbyterian Church in Dobbs Ferry says that Resurrection reminds us that anything is possible with God.

I think that's why Jesus came to the disciples after his death, however he did: quiet voice, vision, or full-blown apparition – however the disciples found Jesus after the resurrection, they found the encouragement and assurance that it was not over... death is not the end but a transition, just as birth was a transition.

Eckert Tolle, author, says in one of his books that there is no opposite to life. Birth and death in their physical definitions are opposites, but there is no opposite to life. Life is.

Jesus and God is, however you might know God. The choice is to embrace the God you know as an active presence in your – my life.

And therein the final choice for today for the Easter People. It is to be present in this world for others and to pray always.

From the recorded texts, it appears that prayer was the last human thing Jesus did on the cross. It is the key to so many things...

However prayer works, it is certain that prayer brings the one praying into closer contact with God, always a good thing. And, when we come together, even in an imperfect church, when we pray together, we become those early disciples, resurrected from self, fear, and the shadow of death to a power for love and healing in a broken world.

It seems Joe is right. Resurrection is about the possibilities of God in our lives.

It's the right choice for the Easter People in a Good Friday world.

Amen.