

“Disciples Affirm Resurrection Hope” –Ephesians 1:11-23

One of the unique things that serving on the Conference staff has allowed me to do is serve in the children’s ministry at our church in Mitchell. I lead children’s church once or twice a month and I typically sign up to take the holiday weekends when others might be travelling or have family in town. This includes Easter morning. One of the questions I like to ask the kids when I’m teaching that day is, how many times a year do we celebrate Easter? Now, the logical answer—and the one that most of the kids give—is once.



But of course, as with all good Sunday school questions—it was a trick question. The truth is, as Christians—as believers in the RISEN Christ—we celebrate Easter 52 times a year. Each Sunday that we gather to worship is meant to be a “little Easter.”

I may share this factoid with them as a point of understanding church history and practice. But as our reading today from Paul’s letter to the Church at Ephesus reminds us, the message of Easter—of Resurrection hope—is meant to shape every aspect of our lives...not just our Sundays. Because of this, Paul prays several things for the Ephesians and for us, as disciples. First, he prays that the eyes of our heart would be open and able to focus on...

The Hope to which he has called us—a focus that can be easy to lose.



There's a great clip from the movie Patch Adams that I think illustrates this. If you're not familiar with the movie, it is based on a true story about a man who has struggled with depression and suicide who discovers the power of humor to bring healing. He goes on to become a doctor who is committed to that philosophy.

In this scene from the beginning of the movie, Patch (played by Robin Williams) is in a mental hospital. At one point, an older patient comes up and asks him how many fingers do you see? (hold up four fingers) Patch replies, "Four," to which the man says, "huh, another idiot."

Perplexed by this apparent riddle, Patch goes to talk to the man to find out the answer. (video)

<http://movieclips.com/W34h-patch-adams-movie-patch-earns-his-nickname/>

You're focusing on the problem. If you focus on the problem, you can't see the solution. Never focus on the problem, look at me.

I think one of the reasons Paul prayed in this letter that the Spirit would give us wisdom and discernment and open the eyes of our heart is because he knew that focusing on hope wouldn't always be our default. As humans, we would get stuck in looking at the problems in life, not Jesus. We would lose focus on the hope to which we have been called.

We see it in the story of the first Easter morning. The women find the empty tomb—they run to get Peter and John who come and see and are baffled by what could have happened. They leave to go home leaving Mary Magdalene alone in the garden—where she becomes the first person to see the risen Christ!

But if you remember, she doesn't recognize him at first. Why? She was focused on the problem and couldn't see hope. She was so caught up in fear and grief that she could only see things through that lens. She didn't recognize Jesus, even when he was trying to talk to her.

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How often in our lives and our world do we only focus on the problem or the pain in our lives and fail to see hope? Maybe things are really bad or seemingly hopeless or we've just been dealing with it for so long. And it just seems like that's where the story is going to end—with that pain or problem. God may want to speak to us, want us to turn around, look past the problem and look at him, but we're so focused on the "tomb" in our life that we don't recognize God's voice.

But we know in Easter story that Mary finally does turn around and look at Jesus. And when she does, she is able to see that the tomb—the darkness, pain and grief—weren't the end of the story. And the same can be true for us. When we let the hope to which we have been called—resurrection hope—define our lives and choose to focus on Jesus and not the problem, we see that the pain, hurt or challenges we face in life don't have to be the end of our story either.

We also begin to really see that letting resurrection shape our lives allows us to receive another thing Paul Mentions...

The Riches of his glorious inheritance

On this All Saints Sunday, I am reminded of the many saints who have impacted my journey. One of the most significant ones was my Grandma Grinager who passed away at the age of 93. One of the special things that I inherited from her was a beautiful emerald ring—extra special because it is our birthstone. Of all the members of our large, four-generation family, she and I were the only with May birthdays.



But while this little “inheritance” is so special to me, the most valuable inheritance I received was one that I inherited through my relationship with her—through watching the life she lived, the way she loved people and the way that even being around her made you want to approach life with that same grace. It is an inheritance that shaped me when she was alive and that I am still experiencing the richness of.

Friends, Jesus died on the cross so that we might have the riches of eternal life. He saved us from ETERNAL separation from God. But that salvation—that inheritance—is not some ticket to Heaven that we redeem down the road when it’s “our time.” That salvation starts the moment we believe and open our hearts to receive that gift. Jesus came, lived and died so that we might be reconciled to God now—so that we might return to God NOW—so Jesus could be the Lord our lives NOW—so could experience the blessing and impact of that glorious inheritance in our life NOW.

In the same way that I experienced the richness of my Grandmother’s life both when she was alive as well as now, so it is same with Christ. God became a human being through Jesus Christ so that we could SEE what the true richness of life looks like—a life

that is lived in submission to God and empowered to participate in making his Kingdom a reality.

The things Jesus did and said—the way he offered forgiveness because “we know not what we do”...the way he saw people that were invisible or separated from society and made them know they were worthy of love and belonging...the way he showed that true strength is found in humble service—those things gave us a glimpse of what the Kingdom of God is supposed to look like NOW—on Earth as it is in Heaven.

But they're not just meant to be good examples or stories. They're meant to change us and compel us to be a part of bringing that taste of the Kingdom to others—of allowing people to encounter Jesus through our words, our actions and even our posture towards others. That is where the riches of this glorious inheritance are found—in a life shaped by resurrection hope—a life that doesn't just BELIEVE that the resurrection happened, but actively works to make resurrection hope a reality in the world around us. And the truth is, we are only able to do that when we accept the power of the Holy Spirit to work in and through us.

That same Power is in us...

Did you hear what the scripture said? It said, “That power (that is in us who believe) is the same as the mighty strength God exerted when he raised Christ from the dead...” Or as Jeremy Camp puts it in his song, “Same Power,”—The same power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us!” I want you to let that sink in because that's what celebrating “little Easters” and being defined by resurrection hope really means. The SAME power that it took to bring Jesus—who was crucified, dead and buried—back to life...LIVES.IN.US...

Let me give you another visual that I think about when I think about this fact. Several years ago, we were living in Brandon, SD, and I was serving the United Methodist church there. Well one Saturday during a winter storm, the power on our side of town went off unexpectedly. Now, this shouldn't have been a deal, since it was the middle of the afternoon. However, it's a bit unsettling when it happens while you're in the basement...in the bathtub. And even scarier when it happens when you know your computer is dead and your sermon isn't fully typed out yet.



Luckily, the outage ended quickly—a moment that was marked excitedly by our six-year old son, Brady, running through the house shouting, “The power’s back! The power’s back! No more dark; no more worries! The power’s back!”

I always wonder if those words were shouted on that first Easter morning. You see, on that Friday, it had to feel like the power of God—of love and of justice—was gone—or that the power lay with the bad guys—like evil had won and goodness had been defeated. I even wonder if some of Jesus’ followers weren’t starting to wonder if Jesus had any power to begin with.

But on that Easter morning, when that tomb was empty, when he revealed himself to them, they saw where real power came from. It didn’t come from evil and darkness or fear and hatred. It didn’t come from “might makes right.” And it hadn’t come from wielding the sword or winning an argument. It came through a selfless act of sacrificial love.

That is the kind of resurrecting power that we as disciples—followers of Jesus—affirm. That is the kind of power we come to claim when we invite God’s Spirit to live in and through us. And that is the kind of power we come to witness to when we celebrate

all these “little Easters” and when we let that power call, claim, comfort and convict us every day. It is a power that saved us—not when we were good enough to deserve it; not when we are making all the right choices; not when our lives were under control. It is a power that rescued us when we had nothing to offer in return. And it is a power that continues to save us, continues to work in us, and wants to live THROUGH each of us.

Whatever tomb we might feel like we’re in right now—a tomb with the name fear or failure...a tomb called debt or bankruptcy or addiction or a broken marriage...a tomb called anger or bitterness or shame—whatever that tomb is, God wants us to experience Easter, to experience the riches of his glorious inheritance, and to affirm resurrection hope—to harness the power of God’s Holy Spirit that rolls back stones and calls us to come into new life—a life that only affirms but also extends resurrection hope in all we are and to all we meet that the world might see in us—followers of Jesus—a hope that death cannot defeat.