

## A New Voice

John 20: 1 – 18

April 4, 2010

### I. Introduction

- A. I had a somewhat unusual experience one day this week
  - 1. I was working in my office and everything was quiet
    - a. And then I heard a knocking noise from out in the foyer
  - 2. I walked out into the hallway, expecting to see a deliveryman
    - a. Or just someone unfamiliar with the church, but there's nobody around
  - 3. So I went back into the office, and a little while later, I heard the same sound
    - a. I looked again, and there's still nobody in sight – by now I'm wondering what's going on - So this time, I leave the office door open a little wider
    - b. And the next time I hear the knocking, I poke my head out to see if I can tell
      - (1) Exactly where the noise is coming from
  - 4. Turns out, it's coming from one of the windows in the hallway there
    - a. And with a bit more checking, I discover the noise is from a robin
      - (1) That evidently has fallen in love with his own image in the glass
    - b. He would fly away every time I walked in sight, but it wouldn't be long
      - (1) Until he would return to the window ledge and gaze with longing eye
    - c. And every so often, flutter and flop against the glass with reckless abandon
  - 5. So I guess it's true, Spring has sprung, "Love is in the air" for all of God's creatures
- A. I just love Springtime, with the signs of new life popping up all around us
  - 1. Especially after the weather we had this winter
    - a. The grass looks greener, the daffodils seem brighter, the bird songs more cheerful
  - 2. And it feels like the best time possible for celebrating Easter
    - a. Not the Easter bunny and colored eggs kind of celebration
      - (1) Although I have good memories of Easter egg hunts when I was a kid
  - 3. But, the celebration of new life that is promised to all who believe
    - a. Made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ
- A. Someone has said that Easter is the New Year's Day of the soul.
  - 1. Thinking, I suppose, of how we often view the old year as past and gone
    - a. And looking ahead to the beginning of a new year
  - 2. In a sense, we do the same thing when we celebrate Easter

- A. It is the hope of the resurrection that gives our spiritual being the opportunity
  - 1. To put our sinful past behind us, and look forward to new life in Jesus
- A. What a wonderful truth that we give voice to, especially at Easter
  - 1. But also in our words and our actions every day of our lives
- A. It's a truth that has become so familiar to many of us
  - 1. That I'm afraid we may almost forget how radically it impacts our understanding
    - a. Of God and ourselves, life and death, even about living and dying
- A. Sometimes it can help to hear the message from a different perspective
  - 1. As in this story told by a fellow named William D. Barrick, who says -
- A. The Good Friday service in Dampara Baptist Church, Chittagong, Bangladesh, was packed. Little children sat on the floor in the aisles and across the front of the church. Rows of people stood in the back, craning their necks to see the screen where the crucifixion of Jesus was being depicted in the "Jesus Film."
- A. Weeping and gasps of unbelief could be heard in the shocked hush as Jesus was nailed to the cross. As the Bengalis watched, they were feeling the agony of Jesus' pain and the disappointment of the disciples.
- A. In that emotional moment, one young boy in the crowded church suddenly cried out, "Do not be afraid. He gets up again! I saw it before."
  - 1. Don't be afraid – the very words that were heard at the empty tomb
    - a. And at every point, it seems, when God is doing something new in the world
- A. And this is a new voice, a new message – Jesus dies, but he does not stay in the grave
  - 1. "He is risen!" is the cry that gives new hope to all who believe
- A. That story helps me to remember the surprise of Easter Sunday morning
  - 1. And for those of us who have heard our scripture text many times
    - a. I trust that we can still feel a sense of that wonder and surprise
- A. Particularly as we have followed the story through the emotional roller coaster
  - 1. Of the events of what we now call Holy Week –
    - a. The triumphal entry into Jerusalem that we celebrated last Sunday
      - (1) The Passover Supper that Jesus shared with his disciples
    - b. The shock and fear of Judas' betrayal and Jesus' arrest in the garden
      - (1) The denial by Peter and the desertion by all of the disciples
        - (a) The mocking soldiers, the injustice of Jesus' trial
    - c. And finally, the awfulness of the crucifixion and the reality of Jesus' death

- A. It is when we have experienced the darkness of those hours
  - 1. And when we have identified with them in the darkness of our own lives
    - a. That the new hope that comes on Easter morning has the power to thrill us
      - (1) Every year as we celebrate the resurrection again
- A. The disciples, who saw the empty tomb on that first Easter morning
  - 1. Knew that something unusual had happened
- A. But according to our text, it is Mary Magdalene, who had loved Jesus so deeply
  - 1. Who first gave voice to the unbelievable truth – He’s not dead!
    - a. Jesus is alive! I have seen the Lord!
- A. It is a truth that has been echoed by many voices down through the years ever since
  - 1. Despite all the attempts to discredit and silence those words
    - a. Do not be afraid! Jesus is not dead! He is risen, just as he said he would
- A. Those words have come down to us on this Easter morning
  - 1. With the power to touch our hearts and change our lives forever
- A. And now we can add our voices to the chorus – Jesus is not dead! He’s alive!
  - 1. And with the eyes of faith, we can even repeat the words of Mary –
    - a. He is living today! I know, because “I have seen the Lord!”
      - (1) Can we say that all together – “I have seen the Lord”?
- A. A mother by the name of Peggy Key remembers an Easter Sunday morning
  - 1. While driving to church, I was telling my children the Easter story. "This is the day we celebrate Jesus coming back to life," I explained.
    - a. Immediately my 3-year-old son, Kevin, piped up from the back seat, "Will He be in church today?"
      - (1) How would you answer that question today?
- A. The great theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said – it is from the resurrection of Christ, that a new and purifying wind can blow through our present world. ... If a few people really believed that and acted on it in their daily lives, a great deal would be changed.
  - 1. To live in the light of the resurrection--that is what Easter means. End quote
- A. The world has always been a place of fear and darkness
  - 1. And I think that has been especially true in the past handful of years
    - a. Terrorist plots, economic crisis, natural disasters and wars without end
  - 2. If there has ever been a time when we have needed good news, it is now
- A. The news of Jesus’ resurrection was like a blazing bright light in the darkness

1. For those first disciples and followers of Jesus
  - a. And it continues to bring hope and joy into the darkness of our world today
- A. Lyn Hill, of London, Ontario tells about an Easter Sunday morning when the pastor, trying to emphasize the celebration of Jesus' resurrection, asked the children's group if they had noticed any changes in the music from previous weeks. "For the last few Sundays, the music has been slow and somber," he reminded them, "but today it's upbeat and joyful. Do you know why?"
  1. No one ventured an answer until the organist's three-year-old daughter piped up, "Because Daddy's been practicing all week!"
    - a. Not a bad guess, but hardly what the pastor was hoping for
  - A. There are times when life hits all of us with somber reality
    1. But Easter reminds us that we have a reason to be joyful
      - a. Even in the midst of the most difficult times of our lives
- II. The OT prophet, Isaiah, spoke these words from God several centuries earlier –
  - A. Chapter 65, verse 17 – “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth
    1. The former things shall not be remembered or come to mind”
  - A. We believe that there was at least a beginning of the fulfillment of that prophecy
    1. When the people of God returned from captivity in Babylon
      - a. And were given a fresh, new start in the land of their forefathers
  - A. And there most certainly was a greater fulfillment of that prophecy
    1. On that first Easter morning, when the stone was rolled away from the tomb
      - a. And Jesus, the Son of God, stepped forth in new life from that grave
  - A. But the new creation that God is about in the universe didn't stop there
    1. The Apostle Paul said – In Christ, **we** become new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17)
      - a. Over the next few Sundays, we are going to look at some of the new things
        - (1) That God continues to create in us and in our world
      2. A new peace, a new way of seeing, a new compassion
        - a. The miracle of Easter, the power of God to bring new life
          - (1) Was not just for 2000 years ago, it is for us here and now
  - A. And we must not forget, that the true power of Easter, even greater than the miracle of the resurrection and the promise of life beyond the grave
    1. Is in knowing that it all happened because of love
      - a. God's love for all of creation, and especially for the human race

(1) And the love of Jesus in his willingness to give his life for us

- A. It was well-known Mennonite author, Katie Funk Wiebe, who wrote these words –
  - 1. As I contemplate the cross, I grasp that its wonder is not in its appearance, but in the Superglue of love that took Christ to the cross and held him there.
  - 2. It is that love that has the power to change us, and change our world
- A. There's a story that I read some time ago, about the power of love
  - 1. And I'm touched every time I read or hear it
    - a. It has a connection with Easter, so even though it is rather lengthy
  - 2. I want to share it with you as an illustration of how God's love can make a difference
- A. It's told by a man by the name of Harry Pritchett, and it's entitled – Philip's Egg
- A. Once upon a time I had a young friend named Philip. Philip was born with Downs Syndrome. He was a pleasant child--happy, it seemed--but increasingly aware of the difference between himself and other children. Philip went to Sunday school at the Methodist church. His teacher, also a friend of mine, taught the third-grade class with Philip and nine other eight-year-old boys and girls.
- A. You know eight-year-olds. And Philip, with his differences, was not readily accepted. But my teacher friend was creative, and he helped this group of eight-year-olds. They learned, they laughed, they played together. And they really cared about one another, even though eight-year-olds don't say they care about one another out loud. My teacher friend could see it. He knew it. He also knew that Philip was not really a part of that group. Philip did not choose nor did he want to be different. He just was. And that was just the way things were.
- A. My friend had a marvelous idea for his class the Sunday after Easter last year. You know those things that pantyhose come in--the containers that look like great big eggs--my friend had collected ten of them. The children loved it when he brought them into the room. Each child was to get one. It was a beautiful spring day, and the assignment was for each child to go outside, find a symbol for new life, put it into the egg, and bring it back to the classroom. They would then open and share their new life symbols and surprises one by one.
- A. It was glorious. It was confusing. It was wild. They ran all around the church grounds, gathered their symbols, and returned to the classroom. They put all the eggs on a table, and then the teacher began to open them. All the children stood around the table.

- A. He opened one, and there was a flower, and they ooh-ed and aah-ed. He opened another, and there was a little butterfly. "Beautiful," the girls all said, since it is hard for eight-year-old boys to say "beautiful." He opened another, and there was a rock. And as third-graders will, some laughed, and some said, "That's crazy! How's a rock supposed to be like new life?" But the smart little boy who'd found it spoke up: "That's mine. And I knew all of you would get flowers and buds and leaves and butterflies and stuff like that. So I got a rock because I wanted to be different. And for me, that's new life." They all laughed.
- A. My teacher friend said something to himself about the profundity of eight-year-olds and opened the next one. There was nothing there. The other children, as eight-year-olds will, said, "That's not fair--that's stupid!--somebody didn't do right."
- A. Then my teacher friend felt a tug on his shirt, and he looked down. Philip was standing beside him. "It's mine," Philip said. "It's mine." And the children said, "You don't ever do things right, Philip. There's nothing there!" "I did so do it," Philip said. "I did do it. It's empty. The tomb is empty!"
- A. There was silence, a very full silence. And for you people who don't believe in miracles, I want to tell you that one happened that day last spring. From that time on, it was different. Philip suddenly became a part of that group of eight-year-old children. They took him in. He was set free from the tomb of his differentness.
- A. But the story doesn't end there. You see, Philip died last summer. His family had known since the time he was born that he wouldn't live out a full life span. Many other things had been wrong with his tiny body. And so, late last July, with an infection that most normal children could have quickly shrugged off, Philip died. The mystery simply enveloped him.
- A. At the funeral, nine eight-year-old children marched up to the altar, not with flowers to cover over the stark reality of death. Nine eight-year-olds, with their Sunday school teacher, marched right up to that altar, and laid on it an empty egg--an empty, old, discarded pantyhose egg.

- 1. The symbol of an empty tomb – the symbol of new life

### III. The message is new to us every time we hear it

- A. And it comes to us in many different ways, many different voices
  - 1. But they all speak to us of one thing – the love of God in Christ Jesus
- A. How have you and I heard that message again this year?
  - 1. In the words of Mary and the disciples of Jesus as they discovered the empty tomb

- a. In the lives of believers who have professed their faith in a living Christ
  - (1) Down through the ages since that first Easter morning
- 2. Do we hear it in the voice of creation as it bursts forth with new life all around us
  - a. Have we heard it, or seen it, in the words and actions of our fellow believers
    - (1) In whom the love of Christ shines like a light in the darkness
- A. And if that love has taken up residence within your heart and mine
  - 1. How will we choose to add our voice to that growing chorus?
    - a. Jesus is not dead! He is alive! Alive and living in me!
      - (1) Alleluia! Amen