

Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from April 12, 2009

Rev. Ann M. Aaberg

“Hope Hunt”

Scriptures:

Isaiah 25:6-9

John 20:1-18



This is supposed to be easy. They tell me there's nothing to it. No extra effort needed. It's all right there in the Scripture. Today the Scripture *is* the good news. No need for the preacher to study and research the passage; no need to employ various kinds of biblical criticism; no need to seek out the good news contained in the scripture selection and interpret it and deliver it to the congregation, because *this* scripture reading *is* the good news. It's all right here: the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

What the experts don't say is that the reason we don't have to spend a lot of time looking for contemporary examples to bring this scripture alive is that we can't. It's impossible. That's right, you heard me correctly. There are no anecdotes, no cute or funny stories, no parallel experiences which can make us say: "Of course! I see the Resurrection played out again and again around me everyday!" Because in the days leading up to this Easter Day, this celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, God knows I tried.

The first place many of us go, and I did, too, to point out the Resurrection among us today is to this season of Spring. We see the beauty, we see the rebirth of flowers from bulbs which, up until now, were deep in the frozen ground, covered in darkness and cold. We observe the flowering fruit trees, perennially assuring us that even though the stark bare branches appear to have died at summer's end, with no evidence of life throughout the winter, they come back now in full bloom, sometimes even better than the year before.

Others point to the daily sunrise. Despite darkness falling upon us every night, we know the sun rise will rise again in the morning, heralding a brand new day full of promise and potential and opportunity. We are told that the earliest humans thought the sun was disappearing for good each year as the days became shorter and shorter and darkness lengthened each night, and so celebrated the Spring Equinox with gusto when the sun came back to linger again, longer and higher in the sky.

Closer to the ground, we share all kinds of stories of reversals of bad fortune. That rush all of us sports fans feel when it becomes a "brand new ballgame." The umpire rules it a fair ball, not foul like we thought. The referee says his feet were in bounds. We even call them "Hail Mary" passes. That feeling that when all is lost, and we hold our breaths as the officials

huddle on the playing field, or they examine the replay, and, and, and, no.. the kick was good! He was safe at home plate! Yes, she was fouled! En masse, we erupt with new life, a new chance!

There are so many examples we can point to in our contemporary society of rebirths: the re-emerging of businesses out of bankruptcy, re-building of dilapidated cities sometimes literally right up out of the ashes. Even the TV show “American Idol” now may grant a second chance to that contestant who has been voted off the show.

New flowers, new days, new life, even new babies: may be reminders of the Resurrection, but they are not the Resurrection. The Resurrection was God’s raising of Jesus Christ from the dead. Just stop and think about that for a moment. Because we gather every Easter and we say He is risen and we refer to it all year long and have been doing so for so many centuries, it helps to really stop and try to hear it for the first time. To put ourselves in that burial ground in Jerusalem, to run breathlessly to the tomb in the cool of the early morning with the disciples, and to feel the impossible, the incomprehensible begin to dawn.

To put ourselves outside the tomb and weep like Mary, weep like so many of us have for the ones we have lost in our own lives, missing them and catching ourselves looking for them as Mary looked for Jesus. Imagine now that instead of looking for our loved ones, as we have, only to find emptiness and silence, that instead, Mary hears him say her name. “Mary.” Imagine that incredible moment of hearing and seeing the risen Jesus, whose broken, lifeless body just two days before had been tenderly taken down from the cross and, amid terrible grief and sorrow, was buried in this very tomb. And now he lives.

We have nothing to compare to the Resurrection and that is the point. There *is no* other moment we can point to and say: that’s when eternal hope for all of humanity was born. The Resurrection is the source for all hope. I dare say that had it not been for the Resurrection, humanity may have given up a long time ago.

Yet, even with this God-given miraculous hope to hold in our hearts and pass on to our children and carry with us until Jesus comes again, we falter, sometimes we lose it, and we wonder at times where it is. In these recent months, fraught with violence and decline, the sight of new buds on the trees does little to erase the images of Binghamton, NY, or the Columbine or the Virginia Techs that went before them. We look on in horror at the baby Caylee or the discovery of missing 8-year-old Sandra Cantu in Northern California.

But it is in the *response* to this violence that we see our hope once again provided by the risen Christ. After the shock, after the weeping, we turn then to the flowers, gathered and offered and piled up as makeshift memorials signifying our hope in life beyond this one, demonstrating our belief that this is *not* all there is, showing that God conquered death and we share in that promise through the risen Christ.

Then as night falls, we witness the candles, held by those whose grief is too deep for words, to show the world that even in the darkest night after unspeakable tragedy, we can find the light of the World. That nothing, not even death itself, can extinguish that light, that dark-

ness has no power over it.

And we hear the whispered prayers and the soft strains of Amazing Grace or Abide with Me, evidence that we know God hears us in our pain and promises an end to it.

All from the Resurrection. All from that morning outside the empty tomb. All from God reaching in to the earth and saying “No”: no to death, no to the triumph of evil, no to violence, no to misguided human power, no to the forces who would attempt, who would even think that they could abolish goodness or put an end to love.

And how do we keep it alive? Yes, we can celebrate the arrival of Spring and the dawn of new days, but true new beginnings based in the hope and love of the Resurrection are found in forgiveness. The forgiveness Jesus taught and the forgiveness he demonstrated right from the cross. The forgiveness we have witnessed by South Africans, by the Amish, by individuals and communities in the face of the seemingly unforgivable. Forgiveness turning the tables on evil, saying no to the continuation of violence, reversing and releasing the grip of death.

Friends, the power of the Resurrection is so great that it changed the world. And the power of the Resurrection is so great that it *continues* to change the world. It’s where we go to celebrate hope. It’s where we go to find hope. We reach back, we reach in and we reach out, and it is then that we get a glimpse of the miracle that reaches beyond our imagination. It is then that we can say, “I have seen the Lord.” Amen.

