

Sunday, April 5, 2015 - Easter Sunday!

John 20:1-18

ALL SERVICES

[SLIDE] Last week, my 3 year old daughter and I decided to walk 2 miles round trip to Fred Meyers and back. I knew the destination and felt that familiar parental urge to keep us on track and on time. After the first couple minutes of trying it my way, I decided to get swept up into her world. And what a glorious world it was! Isabella was on an adventure! “We can do it, Mom! We can make it all the way there!” She learned about footprints in the melting snow water. We took a picture by a huge truck tire. She walked on the rock medians in the parking lot. Her warm little hand gripped mine the whole time. She was on an adventure with her mom and loved every minute of it. What I saw as a 40 minute walk to get some exercise and tire my 3 year old out, turned into an epic adventure to Fred Meyers to buy chocolate milk for her and M&M’s for Dad.

Each of us are on a journey. And our spirituality is a big part of that journey. Some of us have grown up in faith communities who have welcomed our hard questions and doubts about God, faith, church and life. Others of us have gotten the message, loud and clear, that challenging long held beliefs are off limits. Many have paid a painful price for asking questions. But I’m here to tell you this morning, **[SLIDE] God can handle our doubts.**

We believe God is big enough for our doubts. We lift up a book of stories and poems about countless people who weren’t entirely sure who this God of Israel was. And I think it’s safe to say that just about all of us in this room have have struggled with parts of our faith.

So for the next 6-7 weeks, we're going to ask some of those questions. We have answers for some of them. At least answers that come out of our tradition. And some of them will leave us with more questions. Which is actually part of the journey.

Some of you may be wondering why we would pick Easter Sunday, the morning of resurrection, to talk about questions and doubts of faith. Isn't this one of our Christian stories that we shouldn't mess with? When we take a closer look at the characters in the Easter story in the book of John, we notice they were on similar journeys to us today. They wondered, explored, asked questions and doubted what was unfolding before them.

Mary saw the stone was removed, the first disciple clearly was a runner and must have been quite excited to beat Peter to the tomb. I wonder how they felt when they saw the linens in the empty tomb? Mary cried while looking into the tomb, she saw the angels, then saw Jesus but didn't know it was him. Jesus says Mary's name and then she sees him.

So Easter is a great day to talk about questions and doubt. The people in the original Easter story were full of them. **[SLIDE] And God was still there. Present, available, and bringing people back to life.**

Why do we struggle with uncertainty & doubt? Not knowing is uncomfortable. We'd much rather know. If you're asking me to trust a God I can't physically see, to die to the things in me that are destructive so I can live a life of deep love, forgiveness and presence, I would like some proof that this God is the real deal.

Part of what it means to be human is to arrange our world in a way that makes sense. So if we learned growing up that faith looks a certain way, then we feel safe inside that perspective. But if this didn't happen exactly like that, or if that story was more metaphor and myth, then historical account, the whole system implodes. So it just seemed easier to push the questions down in our spirit. Which in the end, hasn't done any of us any good.

[SLIDE] It's okay to not know. In fact, accepting that truth may be the first step to seeing the world as God does. Doubt is often the

doorway to faith, if we'll wrestle with those doubts in ways that are honest and open.

Rachel Held Evans is an author and blogger who wrote a piece entitled, "Holy Week for Doubters." She gives voice to those who enter places of worship on Easter morning, with swirling questions and doubts about this Easter story. She writes, almost in a whisper, "What if we made this up because we're afraid of death?"

She goes on to say, "And you won't know how to explain why, in that moment when the whisper rose out of your mouth like Jesus from the grave, you felt more alive and awake and resurrected than you have in ages because at least it was out, at least it was said, at least it wasn't buried in your chest anymore, clawing for freedom."

[SLIDE] What if the doubts are good? What if the very thing that terrifies us is actually necessary to grow our faith? Because once I'm not a prisoner to my terrifying questions, the journey to find a bigger truth might be God opening our eyes to new and bigger truths all around us.

Someone once told my dad, "I don't believe in God." He responded, "Tell me about the God you don't believe in, because I probably don't believe in that God either."

We live in a world full of people who are leaving the church to find spirituality elsewhere. They've been judged, excluded and disappointed. But we still crave spiritual experiences. I heard Rob Bell say once: "We sense the spirit's presence in our lives and world but don't know how to talk about it non-cheesy ways." Many of our doubts are wrapped up in old language and bad theology. Once we start exploring different theologians and interpretations of Scripture, a whole new world opens up.

[SLIDE] A year ago, I spent one glorious evening with 6-7 friends from church sitting on the rocks at Beluga Point. We had spent the four

months before that struggling on our faith journey together, asking hard questions and giving voice to doubts we thought no one else had. That evening, as we climbed on the rocks, we saw a whale playing in the water! It was one of those perfect Alaskan summer evenings. We pulled out our Hawaiian bread and grape juice to share communion together. Somewhere in between tearing off a piece of bread, dipping it in a cup of juice and watching a whale spray water into the air, we knew God was there. We were reminded that questions, doubts and the presence of God can coexist. And that alone was healing. **We struggle with our questions together.** I need to sit in living rooms and coffee shops with you and hear your stories and you hear mine. We journey together and end up learning that our journeys are often very similar. That's part of what it means to be the church.

So church, it's okay to have questions. God is big enough for our doubts. We're invited to struggle with them together. But what about Easter? Did the story happen just like we're told? Can I trust other people's interpretations of what it meant? I don't know. But here's what I do know.

[SLIDE] Easter is real. Because we see resurrection everywhere.

I see resurrection in a couple who had a miscarriage a couple weeks ago. The pain and disappointment are running deep. And yet, they are healing. Slowly. Hope shines in the distance that new life is still possible.

I see resurrection in a family watching their wife and mom slowly fade with Alzheimer's. They're learning to be present in such difficult moments. They're learning to care for another person with unconditional love, not expecting anything in return.

I see resurrection in a new downtown ministry center with a pay-as-you-can cafe coming into existence later this year.

I see resurrection in parents who are raising little ones and teenagers and wondering if anything is working. Then they get a glorious moment where the unconditional love they feel for this child reminds them of God's love for them.

I see resurrection in a couple about to retire. They wonder what will unfold in the next season of life and they're scared. Then new dreams are born and a whole new vision opens up of what's possible.

Friends, that's Easter. There may be a lot I don't know about God, the Bible, the church, and humans, for that matter. We're tough to figure out! **But I know resurrection is real.**

[SLIDE] "The old has died, the new is here." (2 Cor 5:17)

"I've experienced the death and resurrection of this baptismal life so deeply and so often that it's no longer a belief. It's a knowing (Nadia Bolz-Weber)."

May we be people who look at our lives and our world with eyes of resurrection. For it is happening all around us. And that is good good good news for our hurting world. Christ is risen indeed! Amen.