

John 20:1-18

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first; and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen cloths lying, and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Saying this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rab-bo'ni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Surprise!

Easter is all about a four letter word and Christians should be full of it, or at least we're supposed to be full of it. The four letter word I'm speaking of is **LIFE**. New life! Whole life! Abundant Life! Redeemed life! Resurrected life! The purpose of life is not death, Easter says, and says it loudly; the purpose of life is life, a life that triumphs over death forever.

Celebrating Easter is the best thing that the church can do because it is a celebration of all that is good, all that is true, and all that is beautiful. In fact, I would make the case this morning that celebrating Easter is the greatest public service the church can perform for the world. Why, you may ask? Because it is the reality of Easter that makes everything we would do possible.

Remember Jesus' final words on the cross? "*It is finished.*" When the soldiers stabbed Jesus with a spear as He hung on the cross, "blood and water came out." That rush of fluids revealed what was the actual final cause of death for Jesus, medically speaking, a burst aorta. Which means Jesus died of a broken heart? The breaking of Jesus' heart was what "*finished*" Jesus' sacrifice. On Easter morning the great surprise is that sacrifice was not the

end of Jesus' mission. Out of Jesus' broken heart there emerged a new heart, a resurrected heart, an unbreakable heart, an unstoppable heart. Out of the first Adam's side woman was created, but out of the second Adam's side a new Eve was conceived, the bride of Christ, the church, whose life revolves around the water of baptism and the blood of communion.

On Good Friday Jesus' words were "*It is finished,*" but on Easter morning Jesus was/is saying, "*Now it begins.*" Life begins anew with the resurrected heart of an Easter heart. It is an Easter heart that the resurrected Jesus offered to all who believed in Him, all who read the signs and symbols of new life God had left at the empty tomb. The "*beloved disciple*" looked in at the abandoned grave clothes and "*believed*" that Jesus had risen. At that instant his Easter heart started beating.

Mary Magdalene heard her name called by her beloved Teacher's own voice, and she saw and believed that the risen Lord stood before her. It was at that moment Mary's Easter heart started beating. When Jesus walked and talked along the Emmaus road with two of his disciples Jesus was practicing heart massage. These disciples later recalled "*Were not our hearts burning within us while He was talking to us on the road,*" but only after Jesus blessed and broke the bread did those disciples suddenly see and believe.

It was the final jolt that jump-started their Easter hearts. Is this church full this morning with people whose hearts are full of Easter? Is it? Do you have an Easter heart? Here are some ways you can tell.

An Easter heart is full of new life. An Easter heart is full of a new mission. An Easter heart is full of new possibilities. An Easter church that is filled with Easter hearts continues to offer signs of new life to the world, the whole world. An Easter church looks to what will be with excitement not what use to be in boredom and dried up old traditions.

An Easter heart church throws off the old grave clothes. Have you shed your shrouds? Remember, death shrouds are what separate the dead from the living. Death shrouds wrap the stinking decaying corpse in fine linens and sweet spices, but try as they might they cannot stop the inner decay. Instead of wrapping ourselves in costly, starchy grave clothes, a church full of Easter hearts wears blue jeans and tee shirts. An Easter heart church is a blue jeans and tee shirt church. An Easter church lives its faith in everyday, working day clothes: clothes that are tough and sturdy and made to get dirty. In fact, jeans and tee shirts get softer and more comfortable the more they are worn and washed.

Point of fact, the best jeans of all are ripped at the knees, and the blue is creased and whitened by years of use. Point of fact, the best tee shirt is stretched and worn by use, which allows for future growth.

An Easter heart church is full of rock--rollers. Notice I didn't say rock-and-rollers, what I did say was an Easter church is full of Rock-Rollers. The first sign of the resurrection, as noted by Mary Magdalene, was that the rock had been rolled away from the tomb's entrance. Every body, even Jesus' resurrected body, needs to be offered a way out. Rock-rollers offer ways out to all kinds of people, trapped in all kinds of tombs.

Strengthened by an Easter heart we can, we can roll away despair, and reveal a path of hope. We can roll away delusions, delusions like "If I was rich I'd be happy;" delusions like "All I need is one more drink, or one more smoke, or one more hit . . .;" delusions like "The next promotion will get me everything I want." With an Easter heart we can, we can roll away an end to all the delusions this world gets us to believe.

Strengthened by an Easter heart we can roll away fear, and entice tomb-dwellers to step out into the light. Rock-rolling isn't a one-person job. It takes a community of Easter hearts to get those rocks rolling in the right direction.

An Easter heart church is always in a state of arrhythmia, always experiencing adrenaline surges, always skipping beats, and always has a racing pulse. An Easter heart is an arrhythmic heart because in an Easter heart church the unexpected is always happening. Resurrection happens. Miracles happen. Truth happens. Goodness happens. Beauty happens. Jesus happens. Thomas doubted all the stories. He defied anyone to produce Jesus with his all His wounds. Thomas then said he would only believe if he could put his fingers into the nail holes and spear wound. And then, suddenly, Jesus stood before him in a locked upper room, offering Himself to be poked and prodded. Knocking upside down Thomas' whole concept of reality, Thomas could only exclaim, and exclaim loudly "*My Lord, and my God!*" If you have an Easter heart, you learn to expect the unexpected; if you have an Easter heart, you learn to relish the ridiculous; if you have an Easter heart, you learn to savor the sensational.

An Easter heart church is filled with laughter. The resurrection is a testimony to the adage, "he who laughs last laughs best." The Sanhedrin thought they had the last laugh. The Roman authorities thought they had the last laugh. The cruel crowds and sadistic soldiers thought they had the last laugh. But the resurrection proved God has the last laugh.

Those who thought they had triumphed over Jesus were soundly trumped by His triumph over death itself. Proving this point of laughter is the custom that exists among no less than the stern, solemn Germanic churches. Down to the Reformation and even later, there was at Easter what was called “the Easter laughter.” A German pastor will intentionally insert jokes into Easter sermon. The church, they feel, should ring with laughter on Easter Sunday, enjoying fully the divine sense of humor.

Finally, and this is the most important “sign” of them all of an Easter heart church: an Easter heart will be a broken heart. Christian author and professor, Leonard Sweet and his wife have a teenage daughter Soren Coventry Sweet. Since she was about five, she and her father have what he calls, a heart ritual that is one of the joys of his life. Since he travels extensively and on the road quite a bit, he makes it a practice to bring Soren home a heart from the place(s) he’s visited. He always tells her, that she “has his heart,” and to symbolize that he brings her back hearts made of every material imaginable in every form imaginable to convey to her the unimaginable love he has in his heart for her. Since the barn-owl has the face of a heart, sometimes these love-icons are in the form of owl figurines.

Over the years, Soren has amassed a major heart collection, and often takes one or more of these “hearts” with her to remind her of the hold she has on her father’s heart.

One day, when he was distributing his heart stash to her after a lengthy time away, Soren made him close my eyes. “I have a surprise for you,” she said. “I made you a heart.” When he opened his eyes to see what she had pressed in his hand, she squealed with delight: “Here’s my heart, Daddy.” When he looked at her picture, his heart sank. In the middle of the picture was a giant heart, not blood red, but yellow-ish pink. Even more disturbing than its sickly look, the heart was breaking in two, torn and jagged from ripping apart. But rising out of the broken heart like a dawning sun, there was a whole new heart – a throbbing, beet-red, strong heart being birthed from the pain of a broken heart.

That one image is the best icon of the gospel I have ever seen. The promise of Easter Sunday is not that your heart won’t break. In fact, the promise of Easter Sunday is that if you love as you should love, your heart WILL break. *For God so loved the world*, God’s heart broke. The cross is a symbol of God’s broken heart. A broken heart is the price of love. Anyone here have children? If you have a child, your heart will break.

The price of love is suffering. The price of love is a broken heart. But if Easter is not the symbol of a heart that will never break, it is the symbol of this: that out of that broken heart, God will birth a new heart, a whole heart, a beet-red blood rich heart.

Is your heart breaking this Easter Sunday? Is our church's heart breaking this Easter Sunday? If so, are we sure it's breaking for the same things that break God's heart? The Bible says that David was a "*man after God's own heart*" . . . a man with a heart that beats for the least, the last, and the lost. Do we have a heart after God's own heart? Do you have a heart after God's own heart? Is your heart beating for the lowest and the least? Are you suffering daily from a broken heart? Or are you functioning from a stone cold heart, which cares for only themselves?

I want to close this Easter morning with what is known as the earliest extant record of prayer in the Jewish-Christian tradition. It's a Priestly Benediction found in Numbers 6:24-26:

Here it is in its original form:

“May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord cause His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; may the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and grant you peace.”

Here it is in its form altered by Easter Sunday:

“May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord cause His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; may the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and grant you peace and may He grant you a beat-skipping, blue-jeans wearing, laughing, rock-rolling, broken heart.