

Sermon: “The Gifts of Many”

Text: John 19:1-19

The following sermon was written for a DiscipleLife Alive Congregation Celebration during the season of Easter and then later used for Disciple Life Alive Celebration at a Mission Assembly

The visual element of this sermon was a collection of flowers from individuals throughout the worshipping community that are brought for at first singularly and then in mass. Individually the flowers are pretty and collectively they create a beautiful bouquet. This illustration is a variation to the story of “Stone Soup.”

In this sermon – youth who had been positively impacted by the ministry of the mission area shared their personal story. Stories by anyone impacted by the joint ministry of the mission area could be easily substituted.

Researchers at Duke University gathered data from several thousand patients undergoing cardiac diagnostic testing found that patients with a positive outlook for the coming 15 years were half as likely to die from heart disease as the most pessimistic patients.

The research suggests that creating hopeful expectations for patients – even what may seem like unrealistic hope – can have a profound impact on the health of patients.

Scientific research points out that a person’s health is not simply an equation to be solved with medicine and surgery – but also something impacted by forces that stem from emotional and spiritual well-being.

Christ has died...Christ has risen...Christ will come again!

That’s the good news of Easter – that’s we’ve been celebrating for almost a week.

It’s the truth that we want...and we need to hear!

We have hope because of Easter. That hope is ours and its God’s gift to us – even scientific evidence demonstrates we have a statistically better chance of surviving whatever ails us.

Easter means more than life after death it means new life in the here and now!

In his book, “A Door Set Open” Pete Steinke quotes N.T. Wright - “What (Jesus) was promising for that future, and doing in that present, was not saving souls for

a disembodied eternity, but rescuing people from the corruption and decay of the way the world presently is so they could enjoy, already in the present, the renewal of creation which is God's ultimate purpose.

The Christian hope of resurrection – as articulated in Apostles' Creed – “the resurrection of the body” and “life everlasting” and – as articulated in the Nicene Creed – “his kingdom will have no end” – is not simply a private thing – it's not something only for the hereafter...

It's a hope for the here and now – a new creation!

The hope that Jesus' resurrection provides is what transformed the disciples into apostles – that is, from followers into leaders and empowered them to create the church – which was a totally new reality.

And this church was for all people – not simply for the chosen few.

Everyone was included, even those who were viewed on the outside, to carry on the mission begun with Jesus – heal the sick, give sight to the blind and raise the dead!

Out of death comes life...and that has implications for every dark challenging experience we ever face. **No matter what happens there is always hope because we are part of the new creation.**

But here's the real challenge – we struggle with recognizing what the new life Jesus' resurrection provides looks like – this new creation is something we learn... **as we step out in the faith of the resurrection.**

This is not new to us - it was the experience of the disciples - look at the encounters the disciples had with the risen Lord.

In the Easter Gospel of John – Mary doesn't recognize Jesus at first.

When the disciples later encounter the risen Lord – they don't realize it is him.

Recognition of the new life of the resurrection is always a challenge.

As the church is created the apostle's were constantly surprised. It's never like they expected but it's greater than they could ever imagine.

And so it shall be with us!

I've lately been talking a great deal about the new world we find ourselves in – a world that is radically different from the past. Socially, economically, politically, and even spiritually – we see these differences playing themselves out right before our eyes.

I know many are troubled by these new realities but truly these are exciting times...because it's into this world...that Easter comes – anew – now to give us hope.

God has not abandoned us – like with the disciples before, the Risen Lord is here to guide to give hope and fill us with peace.

That hope is ours in Jesus – and that hope needs to be shared with the world.

Sharing the hope of Jesus with the world is what the mission of the church is about – it's Sowing and Growing Disciples of Jesus– it's DiscipleLife.

Equipping people for mission – raising up leaders for DiscipleLife is now the central focus of our entire mission area.

At this Mission Assembly we not just talking about mission we doing it – we're not just talking about DiscipleLife – we're living it!

Tonight we have with us some youth leaders from our mission area – they're growing in their role as leader – much of that growth is a result of the discipleship training they've receive at Briarwood.

And they're growth – in their leadership role - is just a sample of what we're talking about in DiscipleLife Alive.

I would like you to hear from them and the way they see their role – how it's impacted their lives.

(Youth Leaders Speak)

Building on this is what DiscipleLife Alive is all about – building a center from which will flow the entire ministry in our Mission Area – increasing the training for the young...and for those of us not so young...so we – together - can meet the needs of a changing world.

It's all about raising up and equipping people for ministry and when we work together we can take what we have and carry to heights we've never seen.

Granted, there have been and will continue to be surprises and challenges...like the disciples who have gone before us...but like them my guess is it will ultimately be more than we can ever imagine.

This is what happens when we work together. DiscipleLife Alive is not the end; it's not the completion of a vision. It's the first step toward building something new – it's a foundation upon which we will build and grow leaders.

It makes Briarwood, where leadership is created and nurtured, the center and heart of our mission area's ministry.

It's creating endowments for Leadership Development.

It's completing the Jubilee Lutheran Centre in Freetown, Sierra Leon

Have you ever heard the story of "Stone Soup?" Well, I would like to close with a variation of that story.

I would like to create a bouquet to place at the altar – just as a way to offer thanks to God and beautify his altar.

I have a beautiful glass vase...but that is all...is it really what it needs to be...by itself.

What can I do???

I have something to add...I have something to add...I have something to add...

(Flowers are added)

Wow this is wonderful, this is going the right direction...but I can't arrange this, I've never been good at giving shape to these things.

I can help...

(Someone gifted to arrange flowers comes forward to help and together the bouquet is created)

This is what happens when the people of God come together and respond to the opportunities before them with the gifts they've received.

May God bless the steps we together take – in DiscipleLife Alive.