

4/21/19 Easter Sermon “Why Seek Ye Life Among the Dead?”

By The Rev. Thomas W. Caruso

Delivered April 21, 2019, at Church of the Redeemer UCC/Hershey

Today we proclaim a miracle.

Today we celebrate that divine love triumphed over human fear.

Today we joyfully accept that Jesus Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross paid for our sins and offers us comfort on earth and eternal life.

Yet, how odd then that our Gospel today begins in a place of *death*: The women visiting a tomb to seek Jesus’ body. But it’s not there. He has risen!

“*Look, there is where they laid him,*” an angel tells the three. They probably saw some of the wrappings used on his body there, too.

A cemetery. A mausoleum. The gloom and doom of a tomb!?! Hmm! So I ask: How do you handle death? How do you think of it? Of the death of people, abilities, relationships, jobs, possessions, dreams?

We say folks are dead, but not forgotten. So let’s NOT forget that God always calls us to new life. Life abundant. And let’s not forget that before we can fully embrace life, we must fully accept death.

Death in all its forms. Forms? Death is death, no? Well, death exists beyond grave-yards. Tombs aren’t the only home for the spiritually deceased, tragically hopeless or terminally despairing.

The undertaker won’t visit if the diagnosis is a dead-end job, dead dreams or a dead relationship.

A lifeless marriage, friendship, church or even a faith doesn't generate a newspaper obituary. No one will give you last rites if you are *sick to death* of your burdens, bills, looks, troubles, etc. Or my sermons.

Getting stuck in figurative graves is often disguised as extreme nostalgia. Longing for days of old. The symptoms? Dwelling extensively on the good 'ol days when life was simpler, cheaper, worries were fewer and church was fuller. Oh, those good 'ol days!

Guess what? God calls us to the "good New Days " today, tomorrow, the next day and every day. We most focus on new life on Easter – well, Christmas, too - but God offers it every day.

Yes, we grieve losses – it's normal to miss lost people, dreams, energy, looks, hair, health or treasured things - but God calls us to new life.

2

I'm happy when retired folks find a new life. My friend Stephen retired after 39 years of teaching math and he loved his work. And, of course, folks kept asking him this same question:

"I bet you want to substitute teach or fill in for someone?"

Stephen is direct and emphatic. You always know where he stands. And he knows more theology than I do. In his universe, the words *ever* and *never* have two "Vs." Evver/Nevver! He is crystal clear on that. Return to the classroom again?

"I will neVVer go back. Why would I EVVer do that? God is calling me to something new."

God always calls us to something new. So is my question about death really out of place on this “*joyful, Lily of Life, Christ has risen, alleluia day?*”

No, it’s perfect! What better day than Easter? A day of life, new hope and promises bigger than ours. You see, life eternal was not on our to-do list. Or for those in Jerusalem.

Or for the women at the tomb. As then, God *NOW* calls us away from anything that limits life. We pray that in communion today.

“*We give thanks for all that preserves, sustains and nurtures life abundant.*” Life abundant ! Italians say Abundanza!

Not a limited, fearful or life half-lived! Not a life of doubts, retreats and hesitations. Life abundant! I knew that stuck place for many years. It was 10 years after I graduated seminary before I was ordained. How do we move forward? Prayer, of course.

But first, we must release things of the past. Put it down. Let it go! Isn’t that a song from *Frozen*?

And so I ask: What cemetery must you leave, what tomb must you flee, what rock before your prison wall will God roll away?

Lift that in prayer!

Listen, listen, Jesus is calling you: Do you not perceive it?

He’s saying:

“*Why seek ye life among the dead? Go seek new life in my world of life abundant.*”

This is my prayer for all of us. Thank you, Jesus, Praise God! Alleluia!