

## **Sermon – Sunday, April 9, 2023 – EASTER**

**Rev. Randi**

We have a family of woodchucks in our backyard. During the winter, they hibernate in a burrow under a tree. We hadn't seen them for months.

And then, on one of those warm days last week, my dog Trixie and I turned the corner of the house and headed into the backyard. We were pleasantly surprised to see our friends, Mr. and Mrs. Woodchuck, feeding on the grass. Then seeing the dog, the Woodchucks went back into their hole, scampering as fast as their low, round bodies would allow. Although probably impolite, I laughed out loud as I saw them. Woodchucks running are funny. But seeing them after the long, dreary winter also brought me joy that was part of that laughter.

The Woodchucks are a welcome sight because they tell us that winter is ending. Spring is here. After a long hibernation, the Woodchucks are ready to begin their work in the world again. They will scamper on the grass. And they will breed and give birth to new woodchucks. The Woodchucks are a sign of hope.

Easter is the very essence of hope. Every year when we hear the story of Jesus's conquering the tomb, we remember that God is still in control. We remember that God's love triumphs. We remember that what seems impossible to our human minds is indeed possible for God.

Even though I know this story, I look at the empty tomb with awe and joy every year. I hope you do, too. I hope all our hearts leap with joy as we hear the angels say that Christ is Risen. That Resurrection means that death has no power over us. That Resurrection means that Jesus is always among us and with us. That Resurrection means that Jesus goes ahead of us wherever we go. That Resurrection means that Jesus renews us daily to minister in that world. And that Resurrection means we can expect to see Jesus in every grace-filled endeavor of life, wherever healing, teaching, feeding, loving, and even sorrow occur.

In the words of Phillips Brooks: "The great Easter truth is not that we are to live newly after death, but that we are to be new here and now by the power of the Resurrection."

Living by the power of the Resurrection means that we always have hope. Of course, things will go wrong in our lives. We all experience the deaths of those close to us. Relationships crumble. A tradition we once loved goes away, and we grieve for it. We grieve because we get older and can no longer do what we used to do. We experience disappointment. The power of the Resurrection doesn't shield us from these heartaches, nor does it necessarily turn every heartache into joy. The power of the Resurrection does assure us that whatever happens to us, God is with us to love and strengthen us. We don't face anything alone; God's love will be with us.

Living in the power of the Resurrection also means that we can always start over, even if our lives are a mess. Take the Israelites, for example. They'd constantly forgotten God. Yet God loved them with an everlasting love and renewed them to their place as

God's chosen people. In the Gospel, the angel said to tell the disciples that Jesus was going ahead of them to Galilee, and they would see Him there. These words fulfill Jesus's promise to the disciples that though the sheep would be scattered, Jesus would gather them again in Galilee. No matter how far we scatter, Jesus will gather us again to forgive us and renew us. God will do something new in us as long as we're willing to let God into our lives.

Galilee was also the place where Jesus lived out his ministry every day. He called disciples, taught the crowds, healed the sick, and blessed the children, all in Galilee. So, living in the power of the Resurrection also means seeing Jesus in the everyday.

A German theologian and psychotherapist, Eugen Drewermann, wrote the following:

"Whenever we encounter a human being in such a way that we feel absolutely certain of the infinity of that person's worth and the eternity of his or her life, that is Easter."

Jesus is in all persons, and when we realize that, we see the Resurrected Jesus everywhere. We see Jesus in ourselves, even when we're depressed. We see Jesus in the person who has mistreated us. We see Jesus in the person who needs help. We see Jesus in the person who is different from us.

Easter is hope. We officially celebrate Easter once a year. However, the Resurrected Jesus is always with us.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu reminds us that:

"Easter means that hope prevails over despair. Jesus reigns as Lord of Lords and King of Kings. ... Easter says to us that despite everything to the contrary, his will for us will prevail, love will prevail over hate, justice or injustice and oppression, peace over exploitation and bitterness."

Sometimes we forget about Easter in the mundane of daily life. God can renew us and call us back to remembering and living into the Resurrection. Because God is so powerful that God conquered death. And because God loves us.