

Isaiah 65: 17 – 25, Luke 24: 1 - 12
Easter, 2010, Newtonbrook United Church, Rev. Allan Baker

“Easter,” says our Moderator Mardi Tindal, “begins with a broken heart.”¹

Mardi goes on to quote Parker Palmer, “God’s heart was broken for the sake of humankind, broken open into a love that Christ’s followers are called to emulate.”

Imagine those people who were gathered together on that Sunday morning 2000 years ago; they were the people who were afraid that the Roman soldiers would come for them too, for they were followers of Jesus – the one who had been crucified;

If not the Romans, there was the possibility that the religious authorities were looking for them;

And they were grieving;

- Grieving the death of Jesus, a very special friend;
- Grieving the loss of their dreams for the future
- Grieving the loss of a way of being disciples that would have to change to adjust to this new reality of life without Jesus.

This was a group of people who, in today’s language were suffering “negative sensory perception”. In everyday language, they were in pain.

Mardi Tindal says, God’s heart was broken on the cross. This leads to a paradox in our faith – a paradox that I’ve referred to before. The paradox is that God’s way of wholeness was made known through brokenness.

Mardi says that so often we as Christians need to be honest and admit that we are often tempted to pretend that loss and suffering aren’t really affecting us – BUT THEY ARE. Our lives are full of loss. As I said last week, *“In experiencing the truth that new beginnings come from endings, many people are coming to realize that Holy week can be a parable for their own life.”*

The prophet Isaiah wrote about new beginnings –

*“For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth....”*²

*“I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy ...”*³

The prophet goes on to describe some of the attributes of this new beginning – a world that Jesus spoke of as the Kingdom of God. According to Isaiah, this new beginning would be a world of long lives⁴, houses and homes for all; food for all, and a world where God’s people, *“shall long enjoy the work of their hands.”*⁵

¹ Mardi Tindal, The United Church Observer, April, 2010, page 15

² Isaiah 65:17

³ Isaiah 65:18

⁴ Isaiah 65:20

⁵ Isaiah 65:22

Of course, for all of this to happen, something had to change. There would be losses and grief. There would be new ways of doing things.

Maybe that's what happened to the people who had been following Jesus around Galilee. Maybe they had lost the world that they had become accustomed to. After Jesus was crucified, they had no idea what they were going to do. I can imagine them wondering, "Now what? My world has changed!"

When the women returned from the empty tomb, the others did not believe what they had to say about their experience⁶. Their news was certainly UNNATURAL NEWS.

When Jesus was put into a tomb; that was natural. When we bury a body, or ashes, that is the natural thing to do after a person has died. We do not wait for that person to reappear so that we can pick up where we left off – not on this side of the grave anyway. We say goodbye; we pay our respects, and we go on with life the best we can under new, and often very trying circumstances. It's hard to go on in life with a broken heart, or when there has been a seismic shock in our world – a shock that changes our normal patterns of living our everyday life.

Sometimes, though, there is unfinished business after a death. That's what the women were taking care of that first Easter morning. BUT, Jesus was not there! Even his body had disappeared. This was unexpected. It was not natural.

In 1901 Leo Tolstoy published a book that I have read three times. It has a one-word title: RESURRECTION. It is a novel about humanity. Resurrection is a story about the struggle to be born again – not in the manner that some televangelists demand – not like St. Paul on the road to Damascus, rather Tolstoy's book is about the constant struggle to move out of the tombs of our past into the newness of faith-full living, and building the Kingdom of God here on earth.

After all, Christians are an EASTER PEOPLE. We believe in resurrection. We want to move forward into the new world that God calls us to create – the world that Jesus called the Kingdom of God. This is a world that is present, but not fully here.

Bishop N.T.Wright says that:

*"The whole point of the Christian gospel is that, with the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit, God's future has come forward to meet us in the present." ... With Jesus, new creation has already begun, and Jesus' followers are invited not only to benefit from it, but to share in the new project it unleashes."*⁷

⁶ Luke 24:11

⁷ N.T. Wright in the introduction to The Green Bible, page I-78

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That Jesus Spirit that has been released in this Easter world. It is the spirit of love. It is what Jesus spoke about when he said that whenever you give a drink of water to anyone who is thirsty; or bread to those who are hungry, or visit those who are ill or in prison, or care for strangers who may be Samaritans, you do it for me. A new commandment is what that spirit is about - a commandment to love each other.

It is that spirit that is loose in God's world among us as an Easter people – a spirit that demonstrates how we share love. We are not here for ourselves: we are here, in the spirit of Jesus, to love others and, in a very mystical way, it is through sharing the gifts that God has given to us, following the way of Jesus, that we find meaning and fulfillment in our lives. It is in giving ourselves away that we receive!

Easter begins with a broken heart, AND, Easter ends with the joy of participating with Jesus' spirit in re-making this world into the world that Jesus prayed for. What a privilege to be invited to be a part of a dream based in loving our neighbours as Jesus loved us! Halleluia! AMEN!

HYMN – On This Day Rejoicing

Questions for reflection:

- How did the meaning of the resurrection first “dawn” upon you in your spiritual life?
- What difference does the resurrection make in how you live your life?
- “Easter,” says our Moderator Mardi Tindal, “begins with a broken heart.”⁸ She concludes by saying that by participating in ways that we can be broken into love, “We will be invited into God’s way of wholeness. We will know the truth of Easter.” How does that feel to you? How are you being called to be “broken into love?”

⁸ Mardi Tindal, The United Church Observer, April, 2010, page 15