

April 9, 2023

Texts: Jeremiah 31:1-6, Matthew 28:1-10

Title: “Shockwaves of Joy”

Easter Sunday

One of the most spectacular things about movies these days are the amazing special effects. How many times have you walked out of a theater thinking “Wow! How’d they do that?” For example, those of you who are James Bond fans might already know that the biggest stunt explosion in movie history was in the 24<sup>th</sup> Bond movie, *Spectre* listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. It’s an impressive scene. It took over 2,000 gallons of kerosene, 300 detonators, 24 explosive devices and a mountain of dust and debris to make this spectacular explosion.

Now that must have been amazing but certainly no Hollywood special effect could match the experience of that first Easter morning. In fact, the shockwaves of joy from that morning are still being felt all over the world. It’s the most joyful event in the history of humanity.

Speaking of joy, there’s a word I’ve been waiting for the past forty days to say, and I hope you will join with me. For forty days, we’ve waited for this moment when we could celebrate the risen Christ. And that word is, as some of you may have already guessed, “HALLELUJAH,” the Hebrew word that means “Praise You, Lord!” So I invite you to say it with me now—Hallelujah! [You can do better than that. One more time: Hallelujah!]

So this morning we read Matthew's version of the story of Christ's resurrection. I'd love to have seen the guards' faces when they see the angel descend from heaven and roll back the stone from Jesus' tomb with such power that he caused an earthquake? What an amazing and powerful scene!

Why can we say "Hallelujah!" today? Because Christ lives and he is with us now and always! There's nothing, nothing more important for us to know and to believe than this! Praise the Lord!

**To look at it a little deeper, we can say "hallelujah," first of all, to the victory of love over hate.** The world turned against Jesus in the last week of his life. Why didn't he give up on humanity right then and there? In those last, lonely hours of his arrest and torture and crucifixion, why didn't he put a stop to it all? Why would he remain faithful when we were faithless? Why would he remain courageous when his followers deserted him? Why would he still love us when we betrayed him? Because love is God's essential nature. Love is God's greatest weapon to defeat evil. Love is why God created us in the first place.

On the cross, Jesus forgave those who put him there. He gave his life for the very people who hated and rejected and abandoned him. Hate eventually hits a dead end where it poisons both the victim and the perpetrator. But love has an endless capacity to heal and transform and bring new hope and life to all.

Martin Luther King Jr. in his essay "Loving Your Enemies" wrote, "To our most bitter opponents we say: 'We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our

capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you . . . One day we shall win freedom but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process and our victory will be a double victory.”

Hallelujah! A victory of love over hate.

**And we can also today say “Hallelujah!” to the victory of hope over despair;** even in some of the most violent places on earth. When government-backed soldiers ravaged the villages of the Dinka tribe in southern Sudan a few years ago, they murdered and kidnapped villagers, burned down their homes, destroyed their crops. They left behind grief and devastation. But the elderly women of the Dinka village who were left behind to clean up the damage and bury the dead, set about creating crosses out of sticks and string. And they planted those crosses over every grave as a symbol of their hope.

The Jesus they believed in faced powerful enemies. The Jesus they believed in also died a brutal and unjust death. And the Jesus they believed in rose from the dead. He left behind an empty cross and an empty tomb as a reminder that hatred and sorrow and even death had no power over him.

And as his followers, hatred and sorrow and death no longer have any power over us. And now we can say **“Hallelujah!” to the hope of resurrection and eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord for above all else, Easter is a victory, through Christ, that points us to the truth of eternal life. Life over death!**

Only when you are sitting beside a tomb do you really understand the value of life. Only when you've stared hatred in the face and experienced the darkest depths of despair do you understand the power of unshakeable hope that can only be found in the character and promises of our faithful God?

Today, in spite of anything that's difficult, that challenging you, that bringing you to your wits end, we can say "Hallelujah and Amen!" because Christ lives and because he lives, we can face tomorrow. Amen.