

March 31, 2024

Texts: Isaiah 25:6-9; John 20:1-18

Title: "Sunday's Here"

Easter Sunday

There's a famous sermon by Tony Campolo called, "It's Friday, but Sunday's Coming." He based it on a sermon he heard from a famous black preacher at a Good Friday service. This pastor began his message by quietly saying, "It's Friday and my Jesus has died on the cross. It's Friday, but Sunday's coming." Someone yelled, "Preach, brother, preach!" It was all the encouragement this pastor needed. He grew a little louder. "It's Friday, and Mary's crying her eyes out and the disciples are scattered like sheep without a shepherd. It's Friday, but Sunday's coming." And he keeps working that one phrase over and over again until he shouts it out "It's Friday!" and the whole congregation stands up and with one voice shouts back, "But Sunday's coming!" Well, friends, Sunday's here with all its joy & beauty. Death has been defeated and Jesus Christ is risen from the grave. Hallelujah!

But life is still hard. **Fridays are still very much a part of life.** Imagine what Mary Magdalene felt on Friday as she stood at the foot of the cross and watched her beloved Master be put to death. She heard the jeers and mockery of the crowd. She had been there when they cried for a known murderer, Barabbas, to be set free, but the innocent Jesus to be crucified. And there he was . . . stretched out on a cross with nails pounded through his hands and feet.

I'm very aware, as we come together to celebrate our hope & joy in Christ, of

what many of you've gone thru this past year. Some of you've experienced the death of loved ones. There's also unemployment, financial strain, relationship issues, I read of a man named Marshall Shelley, who is currently a writer for Christianity Today magazine. Several years before he went through two very difficult tragedies.

They happened while he was editing the notes for what would become *The Quest Study Bible*, his wife gave birth to their first child, a daughter who was severely disabled both mentally and physically. He and his wife faced another test of faith eighteen months later when a second child was born...who lived for only one minute. And then, six months after that, his first child died. It didn't matter that she had limitations. There was an enormous hole in his heart.

He wrote that by this time he was full of hard questions for God that you can probably understand. Maybe you've had similar pain and questions too. But he said, this, "God's not offended by our asking questions. In fact, He invites them!" We don't know how God renewed Marshall Shelley's faith after those two tragedies, but He did. Don't think you're the first believer to face your Friday. That is part of life's fabric. Often it's through these things, believe it or not, that we grow closer to God.

Hope isn't something that denies the pain of life. All Marshall Shelley could do is focus on the light of Christ, one step at a time and it brought him back from the dead and gave him hope again.

Norman Vincent Peale wrote, "The great thing Christianity offers is life, vitality,

wonderment, enthusiasm, power. And the resurrection of the dead is happening every day. I've seen Jesus Christ bring people back from the walking dead."

Friday isn't God's final word. The women at the tomb were terrified. Where's his body? And then the angels told them that he wasn't there but that he had risen from the dead. They told Peter. He didn't believe it and went to see for himself. As people began to have encounters with the risen Christ they experienced an amazing renewal of hope and joy.

And that brings us to today. We have the privilege of knowing that God is with us and that neither life nor death can separate us from his love. My hope this morning is that the power of the resurrection can be a light at the end of your tunnel. Focus on it. Easter can change us.

Friends, Sunday's coming in fact, it's here now. It's for everyone who'll open their heart to Christ. There's plenty of pain to go around in this life. But remember when you're right in the middle of it that it's not the end of the story for Christ is risen! He is alive. He is your strength for today and hope for eternity. Amen.