

“The Wounds That Hurt Him, Heal Us,” A Sermon Offered by Pastor Cheryl Schalm, April 24, 2022, St. Paul United Church of Christ, Taylor, MI

Good Morning Church Family! I know that we are already one week post Easter however, I want to share with you some thoughts on Easter that were shared by children on a U-tube video. They are quite comical. One little boy claimed that there was an Easter Bunny so that dads could relax and moms could have their morning tea instead of hiding Easter eggs.

When asked collectively, the majority of the children thought that the Easter Bunny was a girl because the Easter Bunny is pretty and has pink ears. One young lady stated that she thought the Easter Bunny was a teenager in training. You know, teens, just looking out for their moms and dads, wanting to ensure that they have time to relax and have their morning tea!

One young man cited the Easter Bunny’s best friends to be Santa Clause, the Tooth Fairy and Jack Frost. Most heartwarming however, was that all the children recognized Easter as the day Jesus came back to life. While it was apparent that some understood the depth of this better than others, I felt great hope in knowing that they were all being exposed to and being raised in the truth.

Even as adults, it goes far beyond human comprehension does it not, that the Creator of the universe; the Alpha and Omega; He Who Always was, Is, and Always Will Be; the King of Kings and Lord of Lords; that **God in the Flesh** would choose to join you and me in human suffering and then suffer beyond what you and I ever need endure.

It is difficult at best to grasp, to fathom the reality that God, all powerful and perfect, the One who alone need never taste torment, would **choose it** in order to save and to redeem mankind. The reality of His sacrifice is so shocking that it is almost, if not entirely, unconceivable. But let us try! Let us never cheat ourselves by giving the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ only lukewarm, casual consideration; or a quick, annual Easter day glance? For all around us and throughout our world today we see and we witness the need for hope; the need to reach out in love toward our fellow humans; the need to share the Easter story.

Indeed, not much has changed over the centuries. Mankind remains in desperate need. Humans still cry out to be loved as they are; to be loved, forgiven and redeemed despite their imperfections, their faults and their sins. In a little Jewish town thousands of years ago, God addressed these needs. He reached out to every human who was, who is and who is yet to be. God Himself, in flesh and blood reached out to fisherman, toddlers, businessmen, prostitutes, Jew and Gentile alike.

Much like today, it was a rugged world the Son of God entered. Men were sold like animals to die for other’s amusement. Rumors of insurrection and war buzzed in cities and towns, and at times when walking along the road one could see the places of mass executions. It

was a sordid world of poverty contrasted with wealth and affluence, of men treated as less than human, of women degraded, of racial strife and hatreds.

Into this world He came, not as an emperor or with the worldly acclaim we might expect from One bearing the title “Creator of the Universe, Almighty God,” but rather as a lowly babe born in a stable. God, in human form came to taste the poverty, the sorrow and the anguish we experience and witness. He came as just one man facing a system in which men exploited men, Jew hated Samaritan, Roman hated Jew, and religion was usually phony.

He entered as a baby into the corruption of His once perfect creation and as man was crucified a criminal. And while Jesus was shown injustice motivated by hatred, He responded with sacrifice motivated by Love. **“Father (He said while hanging on the cross), forgive them; for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34).** Jesus broke the silence on that dreadful day, not by the cry of anguish or sighs of passionate complaint, but by words of tender pity and intercession. “Jesus poured out his life unto death...The Lord (God) laid on him (Jesus) the iniquity (sin, wickedness) of us all” (Isaiah 53:6).

Can any one of us even begin to imagine? All of the pain, all of the brokenness, all of the horror, all of the loss; all of your grief, and all of mine; every killing, every war, every act of slavery, imprisonment and greed that Jesus bore that day. Every abused woman, every molested and abused child, every accident, every cancer, every disease, every betrayal, every sin, every pain, every inch of it; every cry ever uttered, every tear ever wept, every drop of blood ever spilled descended and caved in on Jesus on that Golgotha day.

No, let us never, ever forget or remember for just one day a year, the debt that Jesus paid. The price, the wage He relinquished for our sin. The race Jesus ran on earth was not for self preservation, popularity or wealth; rather it was a race for our salvation.

Jesus abandoned Himself to hell in its ultimate degree. He invited it to do with Him whatever it would please. “The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him and by His wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

Despite God’s unending display of love and sacrifice towards His creation, mankind continues on in its’ sinful path as much today as it did back then. As a result, there is pain out there in this thing we call the world – very, very crushing, not-to-be-thought of lightly pain. This reality cannot be denied.

But at the end of all the tears and weeping, at the end of all the incomprehensible pain and trauma, we can be assured that the moment will come, like it did for Jesus on that first Easter morn; the moment when the Spirit of the living God will bring to life the silence of our heartbeat and the limpness of our limbs. Dead bones, whether spiritually dormant or buried will walk again.

It is God's hope for you and for me that we would come to the risen Christ with all of our tragedy and loss. That we would fall before Him as Mary did, and cast all our cares at His more-than-capable feet. That we would give Him the chance to reach His miracle working hand into every corner of us and do what He so loves to do –what only He can do: resurrect and redeem!

As scripture declares, “weeping may remain for a night; but rejoicing comes in the morning.” Because Jesus lives, we have hope for tomorrow. We can claim the unchangeable promise of God that “rejoicing comes in the morning” on every heartbreak, on every tear we shed and on every loss we suffer.

Regardless of how many mornings may pass before we realize our morning of rejoicing, His promise is true. Rejoicing will come. No mountain of pain is bigger than He is, no sea of loss more vast. No grave is deeper than His passion to reach, no death stronger than the tenderness in His hands. No ruin is more encompassing than the power of His embrace that bends to lift us free from whatever darkness surrounds us. Our Heavenly Father, the Creator of the Universe loves us.

We are safe and secure when we fall into His arms and cast all of ourselves onto Him. His tears fall right alongside ours. We can talk to Jesus like we would talk to a friend. We can tell Him, “We don't get it, and it just hurts so much.” It does not matter whether we are full of excitement over Jesus or full of anger toward Him: His response is exactly the same. He stands with His Spirit arms stretched toward us, His eyes glistening with care for us and a smile on His face that says, “I Love you.” And in the depths of our heart He whispers and speaks to us saying:

“In this world, my child there will be trouble. I know that all too well, because in this world I had trouble. But there is great cause to take heart, my child. I have overcome the world and hand-in-hand I will lead you through it. I promise you, I will lead you through it.

Peace will come my child- peace beyond understanding. Rest will come – rest for your soul. And I know it's hard for you to believe right now, but joy will come too. There is joy that comes in the morning.

So come to Me, my child. Yes, just come to me and continue to come to me. That's all you need to do, my child. I'm humble in My heart and I love you. Oh, how I love you. “I have loved you with an everlasting love.”

For certain, at the end of the day when all is said and done, no matter where any one of us may find ourselves in life, we need Jesus. Whether we fight against, celebrate it, or refuse it completely; the truth remains, we all need Jesus. And as Christians, we need to follow His example.

Jesus reached out to people with the truth. As a result He revolutionized the religious establishment by transforming individuals. Through His life, death and resurrection He has taught us, shown us and provided for us the way of blessings here on earth and the way to everlasting life. As we continue on in these days, weeks, and months post Easter, let us commit and dedicate ourselves to allowing our minds to be stretched by God. To letting Him reach out to our thoughts, our emotions and our will. Then as He fills us with Himself, let us reach out to others. Let us, like our Savior, choose sacrifice motivated by Love. When the world becomes dark all around us, let us shine all the brighter.

And let us never forget that the living God longs to reach into whatever pain or loss is in our life and do what only He can do: resurrect and redeem. It is His hope and it is well within His power to do so. In closing, let us carry daily within our hearts the Easter message, “His light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Church family, together, may we serve as His light in this world. ~ Amen