

Easter Sunday, April 20, 2014
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon - "What Are You Doing Here?"

Welcome!

What are you doing here today?

I wonder what it is about this Easter story that draws us into community – makes us dress up and feel like celebrating.

What makes this day different than all the other Sundays?

No doubt, the story of the empty tomb and the risen Christ are miraculous, but all the other stories about Jesus are pretty awesome too.

Walking on water, healing the lame, giving sight to the blind, feeding thousands with a few fish.

Those are pretty exciting.

But today...today is different.

Please don't get me wrong. I am thrilled that you are here.

I love having you here.

Today is different for me too.

Seeing you here gives me hope – hope that the church of Jesus Christ will continue into the future – hope that God is actively working in your lives to bring you here this morning.

Let me tell you why I think you are here.

I think that you are here today because no one tires of hearing a story of hope.

Each of us, no matter what our circumstances are in life, needs a sense of promise.

We long to believe that the future holds something good for us.

Today, we gather and we celebrate a day when graves are open, when dead awaken, when life refuses to be contained.

We gather to remind ourselves that with God, nothing is impossible, hope is never extinguished and love always wins.

This is the word that we need in our lives.

Our world can seem like a crazy, out-of-control, violent mess – but if you look at the scriptures (or go see the NOAH movie) you will understand that this is not new.

The world has been a crazy, out-of-control, violent mess since human beings were created, but God, with steadfast love, always intervenes and makes things new.

God's forgiveness, mercy and grace resound throughout the ages.

God is continually creating and recreating, giving us new opportunities, granting us grace – which gives us hope.

Theologian Elizabeth Johnson, in her intriguing book *Ask the Beasts* points out that

“The ever-creating God of life, source of endless possibilities, continues to draw the world to an unpredictable future, pervaded by a radical promise: at the ultimate end of time the Creator and Sustainer of all will not abandon creation but will transform it in an unimaginable way in new communion with divine life.”

She continues:

“Being created means that living creatures are the bearers of a great and hopeful promise.

A definitive event of revelation shines its light not only backwards but also forward in time in the strong belief that God will still be there, faithful and true.

Theologically speaking, the cross gives grounds to hope that the presence of the living God in the midst of pain bears creation forward with an unimaginable promise.”

Unimaginable promise to be transformed in unimaginable ways.

I think that's why you are here.

It is why I'm here.

I am here because I believe that God is mighty and powerful and that, through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, God offers me an opportunity for new life.

I am here because being part of a faith community has enriched my life.

I am less anxious and less afraid when I remember God's presence in my life.

I need less and want less when I acknowledge God as the center of my being.

I am transformed when I recognize my neighbor's need and am able to remind someone that we are, each one, blessed and holy.

As we celebrate resurrection this Sunday, we are called to live resurrection in our own lives.

This means that God is challenging us to face the death within us, whatever it might be –self-centeredness, apathy, destructiveness, cynicism - anything that keep us and others from life.

God invites us to allow these small deaths to be transformed into new life.

In a resurrection community we must be prepared to bring life to others wherever we can.

We do that through our compassion, hospitality, listening, giving, friendship, involvement and advocacy.

When we become aware of how our actions bring life or death to others, we find ourselves making different choices.

When we recognize the power within us to alter someone else's life we are moved to goodness.

This is part of the reason that we gather weekly as a community of faith.

We gather to support one another on our journeys, to celebrate all that is good and to seek strength and consolation when we face challenges.

We gather to remember Christ's life and death and to marvel at the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

We gather to worship God who promises to sustain us throughout our earthly lives and into eternity.

We gather as an Easter people, believing always that God is calling us to be our best selves.

I would like to invite you to hear our United Church of Christ Statement of Faith – it is in the back cover of the red hymnal if you would like to read along – either out loud or to yourself.

For those who are visiting, I want you to hear these words and see if they resonate with you.

For those who are regular participants in worship, let these words recommit you to our life together.

Hear these words as an invitation to join with this community of faith – community of love, community of hope to seek the joy that comes from the Easter story.

We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit,

God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God,

and to your deeds we testify:

You call the worlds into being,

create persons in your own image,

and set before each one the ways of life and death.

You seek in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.

You judge people and nations by your righteous will
declared through prophets and apostles.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Savior,
you have come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death
and reconciling the world to yourself.

You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit,
creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ,
binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.

You call us into your church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship,
to be your servants in the service of others,
to proclaim the gospel to all the world
and resist the powers of evil,
to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table,
to join him in his passion and victory.

You promise to all who trust you
forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace,
courage in the struggle for justice and peace,
your presence in trial and rejoicing,
and eternal life in your realm which has no end.

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you.

Amen.

I am glad that you are here today and I hope that the joy of Easter will stay with you when you
leave.

Please know that you are always welcome here.