

John 20:1-18; Acts 10:34-43  
Easter Sunday, year B

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## CONFIRMATION

The message of Jesus must have felt pretty hallow after his death.

On THAT Sunday morning:

Blessed are the meek,....

Blessed are the merciful...

Blessed are the peacemakers....

The Golden Rule, Love your enemies and don't fight back... likely seemed like wishful, idealist platitudes.... now that the Jesus was no more.

To the few followers of Jesus, the hope for the powerless and the outcasts, the vision of God's way of justice and peace blossoming forth.... were all killed on the cross.

Jesus' proclamation of God's way of being / of living... meant salvation, yet... their eyes / their trust was in the man..... and he was dead.

As the disciples were wallowing in grief and despair, that Sunday morning, Jesus was delighting in the miraculous gift of touching life,... after death.

*I think I would miss touching / sensing things the most,... if death removes that option. The feel of a life, the awe in a sunset and the sounds of nature,.... truly are wonderful.*

The disciples missed all that when they were running to the tomb to see if the rumour of Jesus' body being stolen was true. They were focussing on the worst case scenario, expecting the worst, and therefore the beauty passed them by.

In the mean time, Jesus was strolling around in the nearby garden / taking in creation / life.

Sure enough, the tomb was empty, and discarding what Jesus had predicted about rising from the death...as far fetched, ...they empowered the negative, and concluded that his body was stolen. And, so went back to their homes to hide from the evil that was about to come their way..... because evil is like that.

Mary Magdalene lingered. She was lucky. She saw angels through her tears,..... and soon after that she encountered Jesus.

At first, she thought he was the gardener, until Jesus said her name.

Interesting,..... the disciples didn't think to look for Jesus with the living / in the garden ... with God's creation. Instead, they examined where the dead were kept.

*I think we still do that today. I think we still expect to find Jesus in the past.*

Mary had fearfully concluded that the body was stolen, so an empty tomb was all the evidence the disciples needed to prove that theory.

*It doesn't take much to believe bad news. In fact, we humans are attracted / infatuated with bad news.*

For three years, Jesus had lived and preached the “Good News”, yet it only took two days for his followers to revert to living in the bad news.

I suppose they thought Salvation was in the man / the person JESUS, instead of the message / the way of Jesus.

So, it makes some sense that they lost their faith once the illusion died.

It sure would be easier to have a “super hero” Messiah nearby to stand up to the bad guys.... and to make the world a safer place.

However, I don't believe Jesus advocated that attitude. I'm pretty sure he promoted the power of God's love and trusting the way of peace and justice..as ordained by God as our way of hope and salvation.

Peter confirms this, in the Acts text. Peter said “You know....or should know...the message of peace that Jesus lived and taught.

Nevertheless,..... we humans tend to focus on the shadows / the unknown,..... and assume the worst.

The news is full of bad news....., and we are drawn to the macabre / the dismal / the disasters and our pending doom.

For some reason, these days, we are becoming even more infatuated with dread and despair. Maybe, it's a reflection of our society's lustful inward focus rendering us spiritually bankrupt.

*Too much greed and self focus makes for an ugly view of reality.  
The beauty is not found in an empty tomb, but... out there with the living.*

Yet,.....we are constantly reminded that the economy is fragile,... bad guys are destroying the world,.....and things are only going to get worse.  
So much for celebrating the Good News.....because we believe the bad news,..... and so do our children.

The recent Macleans magazine featured an article about how the bleak view of the future is effecting teenagers.  
They described the perception of the human condition as a dystopia,... which is the opposite of utopia.

Children and teenagers should be basking in hopeful dreams about the future. Hopeful expectation is one of the wonders of youth,... or ought to be.  
Instead,.... They hear that society is ailing / miserable and things will only get worse.  
And, the pessimistic mantra about future decline and doom are making teenagers frustrated and angry.

MacCleans asserts that the appeal of the “Hunger Games” books and movie arises from that tormented condition.

In the movie, teens are forced to battle each other in order to survive,... all for the entertainment and amusement of the all-controlling adults.

Teenagers are feeling controlled, weak and even hopeless, and so also a world of powerful vampires and zombies, which is another teen infatuation, makes sense.

Is life so bad? Is the future without hope?

Or,..... are we merely more efficient at proclaiming and focussing on the bad news.

Has mass media replaced common sense and prudent questions?

Consider the prospects of children a hundred years ago:

Many children were still working 8-12 hours a day, back then. Few were getting a decent education, and there were all kinds of deadly diseases to worry about.

Even 70-80 years ago, life was pretty gloomy. It was the great depression, antibiotics were unknown, as were childhood vaccinations.

The wonderful 1950s and 60s were not so wonderful. World War three was just a button push away. There were frequent wars and revolutions. Many of the American cities were consumed by riots, and visionaries were being assassinated. In addition, we were polluting our environment and ozone at a extremely hazardous rate. Lake Erie was considered a “dead zone” in 1970.

But at least the Maple Leafs were winning back then.

Overall, things didn’t get much better in the 1970s: There was extreme oil shortages,..... and worse... disco music. You talk about depressing..

The 80s,.....had high inflation,..... and MTV,..... and well,... you get the picture.

Life isn’t so bad these days,.... and it seems that we humans always have negative things to contend with; however,.... for some reason,.... we’ve empowered the bad,.... and subsequently, we’ve become more fearful and less hopeful.

Not long ago, a study was done about perceptions of good and bad.

It was discovered that when people are given a wide variety of comparisons of bad verses good, ... bad always had a greater impact than good.

Here is an examples:

If 100 people were stranded on an island, and if half of the group consisted of evil, bad people, then the good people didn’t stand a chance. It was believed that bad / evil was stronger than good.

Even if there were only 10 bad people, it was believed that the 90 good people were still in trouble of being overwhelmed.

We tend to pay more attention / give more weight to the negative / to the bad.

Some examples:

When given a piece of positive information and a piece of negative information about a stranger, people's judgment of the stranger will be negative, rather than neutral (assuming the two pieces of information are not severely imbalanced).

And, if a person has a good experience and a bad experience close together, they will feel worse than neutral. This is true even if they would independently judge the two experiences to be of similar magnitude.

Another example:

Negative information in the simple form of negation has greater impact and creates more attention than similar positive information in the form of affirmation.

We tend to fear the threats,... thus empowering them—the bad,...as we dismiss the opportunities and devalue the good, and so our view of life becomes pessimistic and enslaved to hiding or fighting off bad guys.

Political leaders are keenly aware of this human tendency to fear the bad. Corrupt leaders strive to remind people of pending threats in order get more power.... so as to, “supposedly”,..... fight the bad guys.

Our preoccupation with the bad also affects parenting. More often than not, ...we warn our children or tell them NOT to do things.

In contrast,... if we trusted the power of good, we could simply direct our children to engage in the positive.

Last month, our church sponsored three evening of “Do Art” for the children.

That was wonderful / beautiful. We never said, “Your Ipod will suck your brains away”.... or... “quit being so lazy.”

We merely offered the opportunity to be creative – to engage in the good,.....AND.... they loved it. They wanted us to continue the opportunity to do ART.

The disciples focussed on the bad. They were living under the shadow of the cross / in the dead zone.

Even today, ... many feel that evil is so powerful that God can't love us unless that evil / our evil is negated.... paid for by someone else, such as Jesus.

That perception is also living under the shadow of the cross.

Martin Luther King Jr. rightly said, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.” Killing to stop the killing does not bring life.

The military / using violence can not make us safe—end the threat of violence.  
And, the evil of killing one person does not make other evils justified.

Jesus lived and taught that love is stronger than evil.  
Jesus preached that the meek, the merciful and the peacemakers are blessed by God, and that love is stronger than our enemies.  
Jesus risked provoking the powerful who used their threats of bad things to enslave and control people.

Jesus challenged people to live by faith, to trust love / trust God... because that way is the true way....  
THE Powerful way.

And, one evening the negative / the bad asserted itself.  
It was a brazen, stupid attempt to destroy God’s message of love, justice and peace.

The resurrection of Jesus is God’s laugh at the bad / evil’s futile, feeble endeavour to prevail.

The resurrection is God’s confirmation of Jesus’ life and message.  
It is a clear and undeniable statement that love is stronger than evil and good is more powerful than bad.

And, on that “Easter” morning,..... Jesus basked in God’s creation and called to Mary,..... why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?

Was she crying and looking for the dead?

The resurrection of Jesus is God’s is a “sign” / it is way of saying ..... LOOK for living..... focus on the good / on love.

Through out Lent, we have talked about signs, and today, we are given the ultimate sign—a living message of salvation and hope.

Moreover, as Peter pointed out, we are commanded,.... not asked, but commanded,..... to share that message / to be the sign – to be people of the resurrection.  
Our lives are to be the confirmation.

So, .... let us give hope to our children by being hopeful.  
Let us be generously benevolent with our money and our time..... because God has tomorrow taken care of.  
Let them see how we invest in God’s way,... confident about tomorrow.

May we model our trust in God / in love... by not worrying about the threats or ... the bad guys.

The resurrection is leaving the dark, cold tomb,... and living in light.

To be sure,..... there are critical issues to confront, such as Global warming and militarism,... YET,  
..we are resurrection people.

Love, justice and goodness are more powerful, so we can easily expose the bad.... with optimism and confidence in the light.

The Good News is stronger than the bad.  
Love is more powerful than fear and evil.

And, God is where the love is.  
That's the last and the lasting sign for us.

God is where the love is.

So,..... what sign does our life radiate to others?