**“Resurrection Now”**

**Easter Sunday**

John 20:1-18

April 16, 2017, David M. Griebner, Riverside UMC

Many of you know that my grandfather on my mother’s side was a Methodist pastor. He served churches in Michigan from the early 1920’s to the mid 1960’s. I was cleaning out a few things recently and I came across a letter written he had written, not to me, but to someone else. Some time ago the recipient of the letter had given it to my aunt and she had passed it on to me. According to the date at the top of the page he wrote this letter sometime in April 1988. He passed away on May 6, 1988, so this may have been one of the last letters he ever wrote.

I’m sharing it today because of the first paragraph. Listen. “Dear Mrs. Keith, I read your last letter with much interest. Your story about the unexpected snowfall reminded me of Easter, I think it was about 1924. We awoke on Easter to find the earth covered with deep snow, too deep to drive to church with my Model T. Ford. So I walked. So did less than a dozen people who came to church that morning – what a disappointment that was to me.”

This strikes me for a number of reasons. At the time he wrote this letter my grandfather was almost 92 years old, but he could still remember how disappointed he was one Easter morning more than fifty years earlier. For many years after that he was a very successful pastor, and I’m sure he enjoyed many Easter Sundays when there was no snow and the church was full. Yet when prompted by the mention of an unexpected snowfall that’s where his mind went. I understand why he felt that way, even after all those years. Easter Sunday is kind of like the Super Bowl for a pastor. You want to get everything as right as it can be. I understand why he felt that way. And you can too if you think about it. I think we all know in our own way how the disappointments we experience in this life can affect us, no matter how far in the past they are and no matter how many successes we’ve had since.

After reading my grandfather’s letter I decided to go back and look at some of my Easter messages and experiences. So I grabbed my Easter files and read through them as much as I could. Between sunrise services and regular services I figure I’ve written somewhere over fifty messages on this one day and this one event.

Let me share a couple things I found. Here is a bulletin from 1987. Guess what? It’s upside down. I was responsible for the bulletins in that church, and I don’t know how this happened. Many of you love the Easter story Tony Campolo tells that includes the phrase “It’s Friday! [Referring to Good Friday] but Sunday’s coming!” The first time I told that story was March 1997. Several other Easter messages contained some stories about spring break trips with the kids that I had forgotten about.

But I think what I was really looking for when I chose to look through my files was how I thought I had done. What did I say about Easter and resurrection in all those messages and how well did I say it?

Here’s what I discovered. Over the course of 35 years every message has focused on at least one of three key truths about this morning and Jesus’ resurrection. Almost every message captures at least one of these truths, and some have more than one. Today I’d like to bring them all together. So here we go.

**Truth #1: The resurrection, as it is described in the Bible, really happened.** The tomb really was empty. Jesus really was resurrected into a new body, or a new bodily existence. His earthly body was not stolen. His disciples did not make the story up. The resurrection of Jesus was not a grand hoax perpetuated by His followers, or some kind of mass hallucination. It really happened. It happened just as it is described in the Gospels and is testified to by the disciples, Paul and others. We have many reasons to trust this. Here are just a couple. Every Gospel account places women at the tomb first. In every Gospel they are the first witnesses to this great event. And yet, women in general were not considered to be credible witnesses and the testimony of a woman was not admissible in court. So, if you were the disciples and you decided to make up a story to try to convince the world that Jesus had risen from the dead, the last thing you would do is put the women at the tomb first, or even at all. Another undeniable fact is how radically the disciples were changed. Before Sunday they are hiding out, afraid to say the Name of Jesus, fearful that the same thing could happen to them. Then, just a few weeks later on Pentecost Sunday, there is Peter boldly, fearlessly, telling the whole story, out loud, to a huge crowd from all over the world. The only explanation for this is that the tomb really was empty. Jesus really was resurrected. And He really appeared to His disciples. Today is about something that really happened.

**Truth #2:** **The resurrection, as it is described in the Bible, points to something that really will happen.** Everyone who puts his or her faith in Jesus, everyone who truly trusts in His saving grace, will one day rise with Him. He has destroyed the power of death for all who embrace Him as Savior and Lord. As St. Paul so beautifully proclaims in 1 Corinthians 15, “For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Because of Jesus death is not the end. Life goes on.

So the resurrection is about something that has happened, and it is about something that will happen, but that isn’t all. Here’s the final truth and I think for me, after all these years, it is the one I cling to the most.

**Truth #3: The resurrection, as it is described in the Bible, is for now.** It is something that is *already happening* in the lives of all who believe. In Colossian 3:1 St. Paul writes, “Since, then, *you have been raised* with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.” Notice Paul doesn’t say, “You will be raised.” He says, “You have been raised.” The power of resurrection, the power of this day, is changing us here and now.

Jesus wants us to feel the power of His resurrection, now, today, and in every now and every today. He wants to release the power of His victory into the kind of regrets my grandfather still had about a snowy Easter 50 years after it happened. He wants to wrap the glory of the empty tomb around every “if only,” every “Oh no!” and every “I wish…” in our lives. He wants to shower His victory into the next difficult conversation or tough decision. He wants to send the glory and the promise of the empty tomb to enrich and bless every good day, every great relationship, every hope and every dream.

What is this like? How does it happen? How do we embrace this gift? To be honest it the thing we try to talk about every time we worship. For today, let me leave you with just a little glimpse of it from one of the best teachers of this I know. Dallas Willard knew Jesus and the power of His resurrection as intimately as anyone I have ever encountered. In a book of his writings, published after his death, Dallas describes how Jesus lived His life. “Jesus knew and acted on the fact that [God] is limitless, boundless, and unrestrained in power, grace, mercy, peace, joy, hope, and love. All things are possible.”

This is how Jesus wants to teach us to live too. He wants us to know and to act on the fact that God is “limitless, boundless, and unrestrained in power, grace, mercy, peace, joy, hope, and love.” He wants to help us to grow into this kind of trust, this kind of belief, and this kind of witness for Him and the power of His love in this world, right now. It is not easy. This is not the way of the world around us, and many things inside and out, will oppose this in us. But with the power of the Holy Spirit and with each other we can see growth in ourselves and in others.

As we bring this service to a close with some glorious music that celebrates the great truth of this day I invite you to let your mind and heart go to your own “snowy Easter.”

In these final few moments may God lead you to a place in your life where He wants you to feel the power and promise of the resurrection right now.

Let’s pray…