

THE FIRST SEVEN WORDS

Today we have reached another Easter Sunday, Easter 2015. Is it time to celebrate? To celebrate is “*to do something special or enjoyable for an important or significant event, occasion, or holiday*”. Are we doing something special or enjoyable for Easter? If you are here this morning, are you “celebrating” Easter? Are you celebrating because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ? After all that is what Easter is **really** about!

Now as we have journeyed through Lent, remembered Maundy Thursday and the love and servant demonstrated by Jesus himself, saddened once again by Good Friday and the agonizing death on a cross. Now the time has come to celebrate Easter and being on the “*other side of the cross*” as some have named the place we are this morning.

That place we are this morning, the “*other side of the cross*”, what can we find there for a reason to celebrate each and every day of our life? Just as we found agony pain in the last seven words of Jesus from the cross, I want to point us in a new direction on the “*other side of the cross*” to the first seven words of a Risen Christ. The very reason to celebrate!!!! Just like the seven last words from the cross, the first seven words of a Risen Christ will not be limited to just seven words, but the number of times when Jesus first spoke after rising from dead.

In today’s Gospel account found in John, Mary had come to the tomb, and encountered two angels in the tomb, and turned to find who she thinks was the gardener in Verse 15, and he asks “**woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?**” **These are the first words of the Risen Christ!** There is an interesting connection here for if we turn back to Genesis, the Third Chapter, a woman, Eve, is asked in a garden a question and sin came into the world, bringing tears as she did not recognize the tempter. Now here Mary also did not recognize who was before her. Jesus stands having taken away “*the sin of the world*” and providing an answer not only to Mary’s tears, but ours too as a Risen Christ!

Now the **second word** is found in Verse 16, simple yet profound. **Jesus calls her name “Mary”** Jesus knows each of our names, never doubt that! **He is there when doubt, fear, or any human emotion or situation comes our way, but it is up to us to recognize him and call upon him as Mary did.**

Remember in I Corinthians 10:13 *“no test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; He’ll never let you be pushed past your limit; He’ll always be there to help you come through it.”* Or in Hebrews 2:18 *“He would have already experienced it all Himself—all the pain, all the testing—and would be able to help where help was needed”.*

Jesus knew Mary’s pain, her sense of loss. It is what is Easter is all about – a Risen Christ, Living Lord who knows us by our name, and that would be reason alone to celebrate!

The **third time the Risen Christ spoke** can be found in Verses 17 and 18 along with direction from Jesus. **“stop clinging to me, for I have not ascended to the father; but go to my brethren and say to them I ascend to my Father and your Father and my God and your God”** **Mary had both a message and direction from Jesus and she went and told the disciples the message of the resurrection – Jesus was alive and Risen from the dead!!!** We have the message too, but are we going out and tell the story, our story that encounter with Jesus?

Aren’t you sitting here in this church, this gathering because you know Jesus, you know His Resurrection is fact. In your heart, in your spirit the truth is there!!!! You can chose to ignore it but you know it’s there, right here in your heart and when you take time to calm down and rest, that still small voice of the Holy Spirit whispers to you and He gives you the truth, no deceptions, no stretching of the truth, just the plain facts of a Resurrection almost 2000 years ago that changed history – forever!!!!

Now the location moves to the upper room on the evening of Resurrection Day. Jesus came to the disciples and stood in their midst and spoke to them **“peace be with you”** let them witness it is Him showing them His hands and His side. The disciples rejoiced, may I say **they celebrated?** Now they were witnesses of the truth. The Lord has Risen! There was a peace that passes all understanding among them, and we too can and should possess that peace and joy this morning and when we walk out of church this morning.

Now remaining in the upper room, Jesus gives what has been promised before in earlier Chapters of the Gospel of John – the Holy Spirit. Jesus has repeated the words **“peace be with you”** and compared His being sent by the Father to Jesus now sending out the disciples to tell the story. However, time after time we read in the scriptures that we are not alone in going out.

In Verses 22, Jesus says to the disciples “**receive the Holy Spirit**”, the helper. As I have said numerous times, **being religious, being a disciple, is not about rules, it is about relationships!** That is why it is so very important we tell our story and connect by relationships with those around us, not by giving them rules.

Jesus went on to say if we forgive the sins of any they are forgiven, are we playing God? No, not really, because when we show love to each other, that is the very meaning of his ministry Jesus spread while on this earth!

Jesus spoke now of His love for us. He had a doubting Thomas before Him, but He reaches out to Thomas and says “**reach here your finger and see My hands and reach here your hand and put it in My side be not unbelieving but believing**”

Jesus and God, the Father desires, a relationship with us. It is really central to the story of Easter. As the Bible says in John 3:16 “**for God so love the world**” through Easter the relationship with God the Father is reestablished. **He did it all for us!!!!** We can see through this encounter Thomas had with the Risen Christ how patient and loving God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ are to you and me today!

The **last of the first seven times a Risen Christ spoke** are found in Verse 29 where after the encounter with Thomas Jesus says “**because you have seen Me, have you believed, blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed**” We have not witnessed the living Christ as those disciples did in the upper room that Resurrection evening, but it is through our faith and the help of the Holy Spirit within, that we are just as assured of a Risen Jesus as the disciples, and are blessed for it.

Faith sees with “spiritual eyes” Jesus in our own lives and the lives of others. These “God things” can only be the tangible results because of a Risen Christ.

In closing there is something to take note of. **Of the four accounts given in the Gospels this one by John is the only one of the four where Mary had a personal encounter with Jesus. In the other Gospels’ accounts of events at the tomb on Easter morning there were angels that told the women He was not there and had risen, but in one case, in the Gospel of Mark, they just left and told no one!**

The first seven times Jesus spoke He showed concern for His follower, knew her by name, asked for her to go and tell, came to His disciples and pronounced peace, gave them the Holy Spirit, with love and patience provided evidence of His Resurrection,

and gave a blessing to those who believe by faith, not sight. These words reach out to us, His disciples, this Easter almost 2000 years later and carry as much meaning as they did that first Easter.

Mary's story told in today's Gospel of John points out that having a personal encounter with Jesus has had overwhelming results down through history. Having that personal encounter, that relationship with Jesus, changes the whole meaning of Easter. It is no longer just the Easter bunny, crème-filled eggs and all the rest of the trappings associated with Easter.

The truth of the good news comes alive! Then who knows what one can do for God?

At Centennial we have a mission statement that truly reflects the meaning of Easter -

"to be a caring family of disciples who know Christ and make Christ known in our community and around the world." that is Easter and the reason to celebrate!!!

Amen.