



Sermons from Northwood United Church

“The Way Opens”

Luke 24:1-12

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March 27, 2016

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

I think I have shared with some of you the title of a book I used to have on my shelf by Patricia Wilson, a writer from Ontario who has written books like “Who put all these cucumbers in my garden?” and “How can I be over the hill when I haven’t reached the top yet?” But her most recent book that I have seen is an insightful book about raising children in today’s challenging world. It is called “Why pray when you can take pills and worry?” As the titles suggest, her books are fun, helpful, and very down to earth.

But it is a good question: why pray when we could take pills and worry? In the midst of the struggles of life, just what are the options? Clearly pills and worry are options and lots of us take those two options. Prayer is another. And there are many others. Just look on the “self-help” shelves of book stores and libraries and you will encounter a dazzling array of options.

I remember a conversation I once had with a woman who really wondered whether she believed anything at all and whether faith had anything to offer her. She said, “Your religion is really just a crutch! It is just something that holds you up but doesn’t really provide healing.” Others, including Karl Marx have said similar things: religion is an opiate- something giving people the illusion that things are better when really they are not better at all. Religion as a way to use thought drugs on those who don’t know any better. A way to bring on the illusion of “sweetness and light” in the midst of life that looks nothing like “sweetness and light.”

Which brings me to the story we celebrate today- the story of Easter- the whole story. The Jesus story is amazingly headline news these days. The media seem to have quite an appetite for stories of uncovered bones and new manuscripts. Hollywood seems to be able to supply us with an unlimited number of sweetness and light stories but I think that even the mainstream media know that Jesus’ is not such a sanitized story, and I think people are hungry for a story that is real, that has grit and depth, and that can handle the test of life in the real world. People are looking for a story to hang on to, a story through which their lives will have meaning, a story that will not just make life palatable, but that has what it takes to take the hard stuff: the cancer diagnosis, the incessant conflicts and messes we seem able and inclined to make, the tangles we get into in our families, and so on, and see them as part of a bigger hopeful story.

You see, if we are followers of Jesus, we are followers in a story of struggle and hope. We locate our lives, that is we choose to imagine our lives as part of the story of Jesus. That is we choose to share in the struggle as Jesus did- yes we know something of struggle, to share in the experience of mortality and death as Jesus did- yes we know something of this too, to share in the experience of living on the margins as Jesus did, mmmm, that one may be a little more difficult because of the privilege the vast majority of us have inherited, but it is still a choice for us, to put ourselves there, in relation to one who suffered and struggled and died.

Now, does that sound like a crutch to you? It doesn’t to me. It sounds like quite a challenge actually. Last Sunday we explored the way in which Jesus lived a resurrected life, and we located the power of the resurrection alive in his life even before the crucifixion. He was a resurrected one who offered the kind of love and abundant life that could not be confined by death. That is why he was so threatening. And as we follow the story along we discover the

resurrected one is actually killed in the most brutal of ways. And our faith does not offer us a way of avoiding this kind of treatment. The question of our faith is not how to avoid the struggle, or how to inoculate ourselves from the pain of life, but rather, how do we get ourselves into the kind of trouble Jesus calls us to and where do we find hope in the midst of it. And what we celebrate today is that great affirmation of God: Yes!! Feel free to get into all kinds of trouble for the sake of my love and my abundant life, because there IS hope in the midst of it! The tomb cannot contain the resurrected one, and if you dare to live such a life, if you dare to be Jesus' sister or brother, his kindred soul, it can't contain you either!

The resurrection is not a crutch or analgesic that means we avoid the slings and arrow of outrageous fortune or at least don't feel the pain of them, but rather it is a promise that outrageous fortune will not have the last word, because we have chosen to be Jesus' sister or brother, kindred soul.

The resurrection is what makes it possible to venture into the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil because we are following in the way of Jesus, our kindred soul...

The resurrection is what makes it possible for Paul to say, "I am convinced that neither angels nor rulers, nor thing present, nor things to come nor powers, nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus," and take that to his martyr's grave in Rome because he was following in the way of Jesus, his kindred soul...

The resurrection is what makes it possible for Patricia Wilson to say: pills, take a hike, worry, step aside, for I have a relationship with God in Jesus, my kindred soul, who promises to be with me through all things.

No if anything, our resurrection faith intensifies life, challenges us to live it now and to the fullest, to immerse ourselves in Jesus' story and locate our lives on this troublesome, joyous path, trusting that in the end, for us, as for Jesus, death will not have the last word, for Christ is alive. Hallelujah!