



Sermons from Northwood United Church

“Rhythm Awakens”

John 20:1-18

Will Sparks

April 5, 2015

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

One day Jesus went to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, entered the synagogue and began teaching. The people were astounded at his teaching, it was so new, so radical and he spoke with such authority. There was a man there with an “unclean spirit” and he cried out in a loud voice, “Let us alone! What have you to do with us Jesus of Nazareth?”

We could probably ask ourselves that very question this morning. What have you to do with us Jesus of Nazareth? We have heard the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection, but what does that have to do with us...really? Resurrection, so what? Sounds kind of fanciful, if not Fairy tale- like some legend from a long gone age, and a long gone way of thinking about life. What could resurrection possibly have to do with us here now?

Some years ago, a movie came out called, “The Visitor” starring Richard Jenkins. Anybody remember it? This movie tells the story of Walter Vale. Walter who lives in Connecticut has been dead for many years but he is still walking around. It was like the lights are on but nobody is home. He is drifting aimlessly through life. His wife has died. He is alone without friends. He is an economics professor but he has taught the same classes for twenty years and so he just keeps changing the date on his lectures to make them look new. He always wears a suit and tie. He is very stiff. He has no affect when he speaks. Never smiles. No passion. Awkward.

Then one of the other professor’s asks Walter to go to New York to attend a conference to present a paper that he co-authored with a colleague. He begins to give all sorts of reasons why he can’t go – he is busy, his teaching, his book that he is writing, etc. But the professor tells him this is not a choice if he wants to keep his job. Reluctantly he sets out.

Walter has an apartment in New York so he goes there. When he arrives he finds a young couple living in his apartment. They explain that they purchased the apartment from a friend and that they had been living there for two months. They soon realize that they have been taken advantage of and so they agree to pack up and leave. But just as they are standing, all they have on the street, Walter notices that they have left behind a framed picture. He looks out the window and sees them on the street below, and realizes that they have nowhere to go. So he spontaneously invites them to stay until they find a place.

He goes to the conference, presents his paper in his usual, monotone lifeless voice. Connects with no one at the conference. Goes home. However, over time, begins to connect with the young man, Terick. They have a common love of music. Terick plays the djembe with great passion. And one day, when no one is around Walter tries drumming on Terick’s drum.

(Begin the heartbeat)

He is embarrassed when Terick walks in on him. He is just so awkward, but Terick offers to teach him how to play. They begin the lessons. Walter, buttoned down Walter, in his suit and tie and Terick, relaxed, in his casual clothes. Walter is very up tight, he can’t seem to relax and enter into the music. He practices and practices but still plays very stiffly.

(begin building)

One day, Terick encourages Walter to go with him to a drum circle in the park. He agrees to go but he is reluctant to play. Finally, he throws caution to the wind and joins in. It is quite a sight. Walter- the only white guy, dressed in his suit and tie while the others are mostly black and dressed in, well, all kinds of things. As he plays, he begins to feel the music and enters into it on a different level. He becomes one with the group. He smiles. He loosens his tie. He plays and plays until his hands hurt. He is waking up.

(play here for about a minute or so till it is full on, and then soften and stop)

I'm not going to tell you the whole story and ruin the movie for you but problems arise for the young couple and Walter becomes involved. He begins to feel. He begins to show emotion. He begins to love. He begins to live. He has passion.

(Start again and build as I speak)

However, as time passes, things do not turn out the way Walter would like. Nevertheless, at the end of the movie, he goes into the subway to play his djembe. He has no tie. He is full of emotion and he plays, plays with great passion.

(louder and faster)

He is alive! He has been given a new heart! He has experienced resurrection! In spite of all that disappoints he is living and feeling.

(continue)

One heart, one beat, one God, calls us together. One heart, one beat, one God, restores the rhythms of real life within us and within the world!

(bring it back to the heart beat)

This is the message of Easter! This is Resurrection! God gives us a new heart and a new spirit. God gives us life! Whenever our life seems empty and hollow, whenever our life seems meaningless, whenever our life seems to have no direction, there is God! There is God with a new heart, new life!

It doesn't mean that everything will go exactly the way we want. It doesn't mean that our life will be perfect. It doesn't mean that we will live happily ever after. But it does mean that we are alive, and not alone. We will be able to deal with whatever comes our way because we are alive not alone. And we can live life to the fullest even in the midst of pain and disappointment, even in the midst of uncertainty, even in the midst of illness and death, because the presence of God is alive, here, in our heart, in our soul, in our spirit.

(good steady heartbeat)

Resurrection? It's about being awake to God, to the earth, and to your brothers and sisters in this world, feeling the pain and suffering of others, identifying with the hungry and the homeless, realizing that God is wounded when any of God's children are wounded. It is about reaching out in love and compassion. That is the new heart that God gives! That is resurrection! That is life!

What have you to do with us Jesus of Nazareth? Show us the way! Call us to follow! Bring us back to life. Awaken the rhythm again!

(keep the heartbeat for 3 more times and stop)

Amen.