

4-12-09

A Victory Story of Love

John 20:1-18

We read the Easter story from John 20:11-18. In the Easter story, Mary Magdalene is a dramatic symbol of victory over despair. Think about it. She came trudging to the tomb on Easter morning – weeping, filled with despair, a picture of gloom and sadness. She was brokenhearted because she had lost someone she loved.

It was early morning after Sabbath, the first day of the week when Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. They approached the tomb and found the tomb was empty! With fear, Mary bent over to look into the tomb and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying. They said to her, “Why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”

When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus called her “Mary.” Only then did she recognize him and said to him, “Rabbouni,” which meant “teacher.” Mary Magdalene was looking for a dead body and surprisingly found the risen Lord instead. What a moment it was! She then ran, shouting the good news of Easter to others, “I have seen the Lord! I have seen the Lord!” “He is risen!” What an exiting morning it was! That is the news I would like to share with you today.

About fifteen years ago one of my previous church members was scheduled to have surgery for stomach cancer. She was so sad, afraid and worried about the scheduled surgery. So Sun and I visited her in the hospital before her surgery and prayed for her. The next day, Sun and I visited the hospital again to see how she was. Her face was very bright and even after surgery she seemed very positive and uplifted. And, she told us what was going on.

The surgeon opened her abdomen during her surgery, but couldn't find any cancer inside. The doctor told her that there was no cancer inside her stomach. She said to the doctor, “Thank you! It's okay that you mistakenly thought I had cancer and had to cut open my stomach!” Because the doctor performed the surgery and verified that there was no cancer in her stomach, she received unexpected good news. She had been so nervous before her surgery, but now not only was her pain gone, but also her biggest worry in life. She heard awesome news. May you also receive awesome news to wipe away the worry which burdens your life!

Why do people call the Friday that Jesus was crucified, “Good Friday?” Because, through His crucifixion we who believe in Him are freed from all sin and its condemnation. This is the core message of Christianity. Theologically we call this

“atonement.” The atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ is the core of Christian faith and theology.

What was going on that morning when Jesus was resurrected? What had happened to Jesus? The theological answer is that God used atonement to trick Satan out of its wages of sin and death.

Recently, we have been hearing about the Somalian pirates who have captured an American ship and taken hostage the ship’s captain. They are asking for ransom money. One explanation for the theology of Atonement is what is called “ransom theory.”

Satan took humans hostage through sin and asked for a ransom from God. And God gave his Son, Jesus Christ, to Satan as payment. But, God had already planned to rescue his Son from death. By the power of God, Jesus died, but was resurrected and lives again.

Jesus told his disciples, “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28) This is the paradoxical truth—the truth of God.

God fooled Satan into thinking that Jesus was just another human being, sinful and subject to death. Early Christian thinkers frequently employed the “deception of the devil” motif to explain God’s activity in the defeat of evil.

Another explanation of the ransom theory is called “the hook theory.” This is a popular image that conveys this pattern of deceit, often with quite vivid, if grotesque, imagery. The most popular such image portrays Jesus as the bait that lured the devil onto a hook, which ensnared Satan in his attempt to catch another sinner.

Other images used to express the incarnation-as-deception idea included a mousetrap and snare. All were metaphorical attempts to express the conviction that the powers of evil were defeated at the very point of their apparent victory. Paradoxically, Christ always stands triumphant at the moment of his defeat on the cross.

As a result of human sin, therefore, the devil was thought to have a significant degree of legitimate authority in the world. It was consequently thought that the ransom presented to the devil was done in accordance with the rules of “fair play.” Humanity was understood to be justly held by the devil, and hence subject to death instead of life eternal.

The cross is God’s mystery of salvation for his people. The cross symbolizes the clash between the vertical and the horizontal. The cross, the symbol at the heart of Christianity, signifies the clash between good and evil, life and death, love and

hate. It represents finally, the event of atonement in which good and evil, justice and injustice, are paradigmatically defined for Christian peoples.

The cross reminds us of the power of human evil to crush life, to punish and murder the righteous. At the same time, however, this instrument of cruel and unjust death is understood by the Christian tradition to be an indispensable part of the story of redemption from human evil, of liberation from bondage. Somehow, Jesus' death on the cross bespeaks the hope of new life.

The cross is the symbol of the victory of God's love. The risen Christ is the evidence of victory that God destroys evil by His love. God so loved the world He gave his only Son to Satan to save us from evil.

The Lord's resurrection was a great and unsearchable event for Mary Magdalene and His disciples. God is a living God, even unto us today. God is among us.

Jeremiah retold God's word to the people of God, "This is what the Lord says, he who made the earth, the Lord who formed it and established it – the Lord is his name; 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'(Jeremiah 33:2-3) In God, our every day is the day of resurrection of our life. May the risen Lord give you awesome news to wipe away the worry which burdens your life.