

Scripture: John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

May God bless to our understanding these words from scripture.

Reflection

Where do you all go when you're in need of some good news?

Good news stories aren't usually the first things to pop up when we check the daily news or scroll through social media... sometimes we have to search a bit – but they are definitely there.

My favourite source for good news at the moment is the Ukrainian Saskatoon Support Exchange on Facebook. Right there, in the midst of tragedy, are people from Ukraine either arriving in Saskatoon or planning to come to Saskatoon, looking for support. So many stories of warm hospitality... people offering furniture – even housing... there's job postings, offers of childcare... of transportation.

About a week ago a woman from Kyiv posted to this group... she, along with her husband and three children ages 2,6 and 9 were enroute to Saskatoon and she was looking for help with housing and a job. Someone from Varsteel Ltd responded that they had created positions specifically for Ukrainian refugees. Yesterday the family arrived and were welcomed to Saskatoon with a place to stay and a job waiting for them.

And there are entire websites dedicated to good news stories...

www.postivenews.com and www.goodnewsnetwork.com are committed to sharing good news stories from around the world.

And, of course, we all have our own good news stories, don't we? A warm-hearted memory of that time someone did something kind for us... or we witnessed compassion being shared.

Just within our own community here at McClure we've had many opportunities to share good with others – through our outreach programs, refugee support, children's camp... and it was a pretty awesome feeling last Sunday to witness the children scurrying about our church property hunting for Easter eggs (there's still probably about 150 eggs hidden somewhere out there if anyone wants to go hunting after church today).

My point is that there is good news all around us – we need to receive it!

And... we need to share it.

Sharing the good news is just as important as the good news itself.

In [today's](#) scripture story the good news about Jesus and the empty tomb is starting to get around.

Can you imagine how people felt receiving that good news?

And imagine the joy... and excitement... they felt as they began to share it with others.

And the good news in that story still needs to be shared....

And there is good news in that story that still needs to be shared....
good news about the presence of love.. of hope.. of joy - alive in the world.
The good news that because of Jesus... and because of God's love... bad news does not have the final say...
Jesus' death was NOT the end of the story.
We don't stop at Good Friday.
Jesus LIFE... the way he loved and encouraged and challenged and empowered – and the truth that death did not put an end to any of those things... that's the REAL story.
Those are the things that have the final say... and that is the good news that needs to be shared.

But couldn't we have that good news without having to suffer through the bad?
Wouldn't everything just be better if we could just eliminate suffering – wouldn't that be better news?

Why can't the world just be... perfect?

Let's imagine that for a second...
imagine a world where everything was perfect... all of the time.
A world where there is no ugliness, no violence, no poverty, no war...
a world where everyone is nice to each other...
where all things are equal...
where everyone has a job and a family... where there is no doubt... about anything.. because everything is exactly as it should be.

How's that sound?
Do you feel a little skeptical?

Now what if I told you that in this perfect world everything was black and white.. literally.
There is no colour.
Colour differentiates things... and people... it sets them apart as different.
And in this world nothing is set apart.
Everything is exactly the same.
Oh.. and also in this world there is no choice.
No choice in who you marry, in your career path or in pretty much anything you do.

How's that sound?

Have any of you watched the movie "The Giver"?
or read the book?

Here's a synopsis?\

Following some horrific event, referred to as The Ruin, society is reorganized in such a way so as to protect people from ever having to experiencing suffering again...

and in this society all memories from the past are held by one person who is called the Receiver...

the Receiver holds all the memories in order to shield the rest of the community from the pain of remembering.

Okay.. now "sameness" is valued above everything else.

Multiple factors have gone into creating a monochromatic world... literally, colors have been erased... individuality doesn't exist – it has been crushed...

every move someone makes is monitored from the moment of birth.

natural families have been replaced by artificial "family units"...

and choice has been eliminated...

And there is this annoyingly soothing voice that makes passive-aggressive scolding announcements over loud speakers throughout the day... keeping everyone in line

Something called "precision of language" is enforced...

people are not able to lie –

and they are also not able to express vague concepts like love.

When people get old or unwell...

or if they break the rules and are believed to be "uncontrollable"

they participate in beautiful ceremony called "release to elsewhere"...

which is, in fact, lethal injection.

So now that you've got the picture... hopefully... I'm going to share a scene with you.

In this scene a girl, Fiona, is about to be "released to elsewhere" because she has been deemed uncontrollable. Fiona had discovered the limits under which they live and was trying to break free... but was caught.

She is about to be injected when the former Receiver, played by Jeff Bridges, tries to stop it.

He is talking with The Chief Elder, played by Meryl Streep.

The Receiver asks, "Do you know what its like? To love someone? I do. I've cried, I've felt true sorrow. I've sung, danced. I've felt real joy."

The Chief Elder responds, "Then you should know better than anyone. You have seen children starve. You've seen people stand on each other's necks just for the view. You know what it feels like when men blow each other up over a simple line in the sand. And yet, you and Jonas want to open that door again, bring all that back."

The Receiver replies, "if only you could see the possibility of love. With love comes faith, with it comes hope"

Interrupting, the Chief Elder says, "love is just passion that can turn.. into contempt... into murder."

"We can choose better" the Receiver says.

Chief Elder says, " People are weak. People are selfish. When people have the freedom to choose, they choose wrong every single time.

The Receiver says, "loss and pain, music, joy, the raw, impossible, beautiful feeling of love. We are living a life of shadows, of echoes, of faint, distant whispers of what once made us real."

I watched this movie Easter evening... so the death and resurrection of Jesus was fresh on my mind.

Each year during the Youth Easter Vigil we participate in a "Stations of the Cross" experience where we remember together the betrayal, conviction, torture and death of Jesus... we lament, we pray, we make connections to events happening in the world today... and then, finally... at around 4am, we get to share in the joy and excitement of his friends and followers as they discover the empty tomb and realize what has happened there.

So with that story still sitting on my heart, I watched The Giver... and my mind was making all kinds of connections.

Those who loved Jesus believed they had lost everything.

The Ruin had come into their lives.

They were afraid... and felt lost... and I can imagine the love and hope that Jesus had brought into their lives felt like it was slipping away.

They had just witnessed the ugliest side of humanity...

The ugly side that The Chief Elder and other leaders wanted to protect the people from... by removing the ability to choose wrong... to choose ugly

And The Chief Elder could not understand why anyone would open the door to that kind of suffering again.

And why would they?

Because of love.

The Giver says “If you could only see the possibility of love... with love comes faith... with love comes hope”.

Even just the possibility of love is enough to be willing to risk being vulnerable to all that suffering and betrayal... and the unpleasantness that often surrounds death.

Crying tears of joy.... and sorrow... singing, dancing, laughing... all are only possible in the context of love... without love we have only – black and white -

But what about The Chief Elder’s response that “Love is just passion that turns into contempt and murder”?

What about her belief that we... that all people... are weak and selfish... and that given the freedom to choose we will choose wrong... every single time.

While it is true... I won’t deny... that humanity does some pretty stupid things sometimes... that we make bad choices – choices that hurt others, ourselves, our planet....

It is also true... that we have the capacity... and more often than not... choose to be and participate in amazing, kind, compassionate, loving things.

I believe that if we could weigh the bad against the good... put all the bad, hurtful, neglectful, selfish things over here... and all of the good, beautiful, selfless things over here... here would easily topple the scale.

Just sit for a second and think of the good things you’ve witnessed or heard about or even participated in.... remember the stories I showed you earlier... all of the places where good news stories are shared in abundance...

I’m willing to bet that as I shared those stories earlier, you were remembering other stories also....there are just so many.

Good heavens in this community alone... just think about it.

Think about all of the beautiful, kind, hope filled things we have been a part of.

The scripture passage this morning is a story about fear... and about doubt... and it is also a story of faith – of hope.

The disciples had locked themselves away... full of fear... unwilling... unable... to face the cruelty of the world.

And then... Jesus appeared to them saying “peace be with you”.

And he showed them his scars....

He did not show his scars to remind them of the horrible thing that had happened... he showed them as evidence of love... of hope... of life.

And then he sends them into the world... "as God sent me, so I send you".

God sent Jesus in love... surrounded by love... to be love in the world.

And Jesus sent the disciples to be and do the same.

Not in retaliation for what has happened... but in love.

Going out in love means being fully aware of the ugliness... the brokenness that exists in us... and in the world around us... but not allowing it to control us – to keep us small and afraid –

And I know for me... I find that so so so much easier to do when I remember Jesus... when I remember his love and the peace that he offered to all who followed him.

And I also need to remember that Jesus did not appear to his disciples one by one and send them out each individually on their own to bring love to the world...

He sent them as community... connected to him... to God... and to each other.

We need to remember Jesus and we also need to surround ourselves with people who can remind us as often as we need to be reminded of the power of love and the presence of goodness in the world.

We need connection.

Connection to God

Connection to others

and Connection to the deepest part of ourselves.

Let's not be The Chief Elder... and see only the possibility of catastrophe... only the choices that cause destruction... only the risk of love.

Let's be The Receiver... willing to risk.. to be vulnerable... to connect deeply...and see within us and all around us the possibility of love.

I want to end with a quote from my favourite author and motivational speaker Brene Brown from her book "Daring Greatly" ... a book about having the courage to be vulnerable... to take risks... in a world that can sometimes feel harsh and even cruel...

"I spent a lot of years trying to outrun or outsmart vulnerability by making things certain and definite, black and white, good and bad. My inability to lean into the discomfort of vulnerability limited the fullness of those important experiences that are wrought with

uncertainty: Love, belonging, trust, joy, and creativity to name a few.”

“Vulnerability is not weakness, and the uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure we face every day are not optional. Our only choice is a question of engagement. Our willingness to own and engage with our vulnerability determines the depth of our courage and the clarity of our purpose; the level to which we protect ourselves from being vulnerable is a measure of our fear and disconnection.”

Jesus called his disciples out of... away from... their fear and disconnection into the fullness of life in all its complexities.

Jesus still calls.

He's calling right now.

Lets take a moment in quiet to listen.

Amen.