

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard
Easter Sunday

April 12, 2020

Scriptures:

Matthew 2: 1-10

What about Easter?

As soon as I started to even think about suspending in person worship questions about Easter started to arise. Will there still be Easter? Can we have Easter?

Now that I have spent a whole lot of time processing the reality of our times I can respond. "Of course we can have Easter. Easter is here. There is always Easter."

I received a phone call from the paper this week asking me how churches and places of faith are coping with the pandemic especially in their high holy season. The question was a bit of a gift because it forced me to slow down and stop just going through the motions a bit.

I have been deeply reminded in the last weeks how little the church is about the building. The church is about the people. We know this but sometimes we forget.

We forget that

Easter comes alive in every human connection.

Easter comes alive in all our senses, in our very being, in every breath we take

Easter comes alive as we recognize new life, as we live into hope, as we remember God is with us even in this challenging time of the journey of life.

It is true that being in the church together with the extra music with soloists and bands, the vibrant sight of Easter lilies in the sanctuary, the cross filled with flowers, the new pascal Christ candle processed into the sanctuary all of these things are what many of us think of when we think of Easter.

We hold memories of last Easter. Memories of any Easter we have ever shared anywhere with anyone before has been rushing through our minds lately.

But it is the memories of that first Easter morning that we share in sacred story every year that still lives.

Easter celebrates new life. Life that has overcome the hardest, darkest, most brutal times. Easter calls us to hope. To hope in one another, to hope in a future we cannot yet see or imagine.

That must have been exactly what it was like for Mary and all the disciples on the first Easter morning.

I'm going to be honest and tell you it does feel like the fullness of the Easter story is hard to grasp today. In fact I imagine that when we are able to come back together in worship it will be the biggest Easter experience we have had in the church in a long time.

Today I feel like we are all living a holy Saturday kind of life. The death of the life we have known has happened and we are waiting, waiting, waiting, grieving, grieving what we have known life to be, being forced into a new reality. Like Mary and the disciples of long ago who lost the one that gave them direction, the one that showed them the way so many of us have lost our way. Like Mary and all the disciples before us we want to have faith but we just can't see it all the time.

Sure we get glimpses of hope but most of the time we just wonder how this happened how we got to this dead space.

And yet at the same time already on trees we see the buds and blossoms that we imagine as signs of the Easter life. Easter is alive in the natural world around us, inviting us to see beyond these earliest days of spring.

It's true that most of us our missing out of many of our spring activities, our rights our rituals, I was so ready to start dragon boating again and the week we were to put the boat in the water the whole season got cancelled.

I had to give up hosting my annual community Easter egg hunt, neighbours have told me how sad they are about this - sure we are going to decorate our windows and gardens and try and make it 'festive' but...others may be missing their in person graduations, my niece was supposed to be headed overseas for school this month she had a dream....and another on a mission trip, but life got cancelled.

But Easter is not cancelled.

Easter is alive in all the ways we reach out to one another across this physical distance.

Easter is alive when grandparents video chat story time to grandchildren.

Easter is alive when families and friends get together online for birthday parties.

Easter is alive when the children meet for children's church over zoom on a Sunday morning or bedtime stories on Wednesday nights.

Easter is alive with every phone call made to connect with someone who lives alone.

Even in the midst of physical distancing and sheltering in place, Easter lives in the new ways we are learning to show love and care for one another.

Easter is not cancelled and neither is church.

The church is not a building.

The church lives wherever people of faith — any faith — share in love and hope.

The church lives in every social media post of beauty and words of encouragement.
The church lives in every text and phone call made to keep connection alive.
The church lives in new communications platforms like Zoom and old platforms like “phone trees” and “prayer chains.”

The seats have been empty and piled up since we suspended in-person worship on Sundays, but the church is still alive. People are praying and singing in their pyjamas from home. Things are surely different and it is a lot easier to see the shadows than it is the dawn for many these days.

We’ve never seen an Easter like this one, with billions of people sheltering at home, in-person church services cancelled, and a deadly virus sweeping its way across the globe. But this fifty-day season of Eastertide sabbath presents an opportunity: for new life-giving acts of Easter solidarity. And part of sabbath-keeping, is remembering those who cannot easily keep sabbath (health workers, first responders, grocery workers, and all those whose jobs are still being done).

We have a new way of recreating our world so that all may flourish.
Did you hear what the angel said this morning? “Don’t be afraid” “fear not.” We have heard the angels say that before but this time it is different. The whole world is afraid.
So how do we do that? How do we live without fear this in THIS world? What is the good news for us today? What is the good news for those of us who despair that death-dealing powers have the upper hand?

Our faith gives us that good news Easter means God ultimately is and will be more powerful than death. Wow. If ever there was a time I needed to be reminded of that it is now.

For those who feel isolated and lonely - listen to the angels voice fear not.
For those who despair in the midst of pain or anguish - *take heart*. You are not alone: Jesus suffers with you in solidarity and companionship, and Easter means you will rise again.

Indeed, Easter means that God has taken one of the worst things in the world (the Roman cross) and remade it into one of the best (the Tree of Life), a sword into a ploughshare - and if the worst, then also the whole creation in the end! Like the cross, the empty tomb is a great divine mystery, a rising sun dispelling shadows in multiple directions. *Alleluia!*

As I stand here in our empty sacred gathering place preparing a Easter reflection for you I recognize how empty it feels and yet that is what this day is about, it’s about an empty tomb. It’s an empty tomb that marks the beginning of the Resurrection. And that got me thinking

This room may be empty but God is not dead and the life of the church is not dead it is alive and well. Jesus got up and left the tomb to go out share the good news that no matter how hard and harsh and corrupt and devastating this world is Love and goodness and hope will overcome.

This year we have left the building empty and we are discovering God alive and well outside of our religious ways of practicing.

The empty tomb represents life; It is the salvation message that speaks life in our Christian faith. In the same manner, may our empty churches speak to our care for life as an exercise of the very faith we say we are part of.

How do we celebrate Easter? We offer gratitude for one another, and we confess our fears. And in the many ways we experience and express our faith in a new way, we hear a holy invitation to receive new hope.

Our Higher Power. Our Divine Source of Life and Love. Our Creator. Our Christ. Our Holy Spirit offers us an experience of strength, grace, love and hope greater than ourselves.

No one has cancelled Easter it is alive and well as our Compassion, hope, love, grace, and faith become more alive together now.

So let us Easter together.

Amen