

March 27, 2016



"Streams of Mercy: To Live in the House of the Lord Forever"

Sermon by Rev. Patricia Farris

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

Luke 24:1-12

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

It's a beautiful, glorious Easter morning. Aren't we all ready for our hearts to be lifted up in joy and praise? I am so ready for it to be Easter at last, and maybe you are, too.

So please join me in preaching this sermon using the traditional Easter greeting of the church. I say: Christ is Risen! And you all respond: **"HE IS RISEN INDEED."**

Why are we here this morning? We and all the folks who gathered out on the Palisades for our earlier sunrise service are here looking for *life*, for today and for forever.

When those women disciples, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, went to the tomb that first Easter morning, they thought they knew what they were going to find. A tomb. A place of death and mourning, sadness, grief. When they saw that the stone had been rolled away and found the tomb empty, they didn't know what to make of it. "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" The angel asked. "He has been raised, just as he told you." And their minds and their hearts started to remember everything he had said and done and promised. And they began, from that moment forward, to look for life. They caught a first glimpse of what it mean for them to live in the life and love and the power of God. And that turned them from frightened mourners into the first evangelists for the Lord of Life and Love.

Christ is Risen! **HE IS RISEN INDEED.**

It's been a hard few weeks just lately amidst reports of terrorist bombings, violence and mayhem around the world and in our own cities. The news wears on us. It breaks our hearts and ratchets up our fear. We forget how to look for the living among the dead. How do we become people of faith, like these first evangelists, who move from a place of sorrow and darkness and become children of the light, witnesses to love?

The day after the bombings in Brussels last week, our United Methodist Bishop Patrick Streiff, who leads United Methodists in Central and Southern Europe, urged us "to continue to follow Christ in this week of Passion and Easter."

"As those who follow Jesus," he said, "the crucified and resurrected One, we need to continue in doing good as much as we can, in building respectful community, in working for peace and justice, in being agents of reconciliation and never give up—despite blind violence, hatred or paralyzing fear, wherever we live."

Quite frankly, I am here this morning because I need to remember, perhaps like many of you, I need to remember who we are. I need to recommit to being a child of God who serves a Risen Savior, never giving up, living in the house of the Lord forever.

Christ is Risen! **HE IS RISEN INDEED.**

You know, Easter shows us what kind of God our God really is. Easter was not a one-time event that happened early one morning two millennia ago. It is a here and now invitation to live a life of joy and peace today and all the days of our lives. Easter is as powerful for each and every one of us today as it was for those women on that first holy morn.

In Easter, we hear a God who says: I love you so much, my children, that I sent Jesus to live your life and die your death, to rejoice with you and suffer with you, so that you can trust just how much I love you. My power is in the power of love and mercy which no tomb can contain.

Easter shows us what kind of God our God really is. Our God is not an idea, a philosophical construct. Our God is not a judgmental bully or a capricious monarch. Our God is a force of love. The name of our God is mercy. Our God is alive in this world and alive in every one of us.

Easter is a witness to our Risen Savior who triumphs over the violence of this world and over the grave--over all the powers of sin and darkness. Everything about Easter should be in **BOLD CAPS** and a thousand exclamation points.

Christ is Risen. **HE IS RISEN INDEED!**

A few minutes ago, we heard Bill read the familiar words of the 23rd Psalm, words that Jesus would surely have known by heart. This psalm was formational for Jesus and it can be formational for each of us. It was his conviction and it can be our conviction to trust in God's goodness and mercy and, in so doing, find real and eternal life, more life, and a better life than we have ever dreamed of.

There's something really important here that can get lost in the familiar English translations from the Hebrew. That last line of the psalm should read something more like this: "Surely goodness and mercy shall PURSUE me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." There's a fierceness in that assertion that we would do well to remember. "Surely goodness and mercy shall PURSUE me, all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

What a word for Easter morning, this day like no other when God shows us who God really is and so convincingly demonstrates God's persistent love for us. God never gives up on us, never lets us go, but pursues us with goodness and mercy. Who will go all the way to hell and back to call us home and raise us up.

God knows how we will be tempted to drift away, or to grow deaf to God's Word, or to become complacent or despairing. God knows what all the things that happen in this life can do to us—wear us down, set us on the wrong path. So God says: "when you don't get it, I will roll away whatever stone is blocking your way. When you wander off, I will send goodness and mercy to come after you and find you. And bring you home. I will send goodness and mercy out after you to open the eyes of your mind and heart, to give you courage and strength. I will send goodness and mercy to raise you up, to bring you back close to me, that you might live in my house forever."

Easter faith is a gift God desperately wants each of us to claim as our own. Faith is about God doing something for us that we cannot do for ourselves. Just like those women on the first Easter morn, God wants us to find purpose, to find meaning, to find joy. God is bent on blessing us with new life—now and for all our days. God is always whispering in our ear: "Neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from my love for you in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says: "Make your home in me, as I make my home in you." Our Lord and Risen Savior opens the door to the house of the Lord even now, even this very day, in the midst of our anxious and fear-filled lives and world.

We shall dwell in the house of the Lord now and forever. The house of the Lord is the home of love. The house of the Lord is where we come, again and again, to repair some brokenness in our lives. It where we come, again and again, to renew some deficit of energy or spirit. It is where we come, again and again, to listen for that voice that will guide our feet. It is where we come, again and again, to be still and know that God is God. It is where we come, again and again, to be raised up.

We shall dwell in the house of the Lord, the home of love, now and forever. In a world where the vision of a love that heals and frees and brings new life seems almost too good to be true, God's forever is God's promise that surely, certainly, **absolutely**--God's goodness and mercy shall pursue us all the days of our life. We are God's own — yesterday, today and tomorrow.

May this Easter morning mark a new beginning for each of us. A day to remember who our God really is. A day to find peace and power in God's all-embracing love. A day to give thanks for a God who never gives up on us, who never lets us go, but pursues us with goodness and mercy. A God who will go all the way to hell and back to call us home and raise us up. A day to praise the Risen Christ who summons us all: "Follow me!," inviting us to live now and forever with him in the house of love, becoming those through whom the light, the love, the mercy, the justice, the peace of God flow to all the world.

Christ is Risen! **HE IS RISEN INDEED!**

Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen.

I am indebted to sermons by Susan R. Andrews, Ann Voskamp, Mike Kinman, and the writings of Henri Nouwen which provided inspiration for this sermon.

© Rev. Patricia Farris 2016. Permission is given for brief quotation with attribution. All other rights reserved.

First United Methodist Church • 1008 Eleventh Street Santa Monica, CA 90403
www.santamonicaumc.org ■ 310-393-8258