

Jogging Our Memory

[Text - John 20:1-18]

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March 27, 2016

Is there any sillier sight than a grown person in a long robe, running back and forth, gasping for air? Oh, I'm not talking about *me*; I mean those 1st Century "Joggers for Jesus" - running back and forth from the tomb on that first Easter morning. How strange that must have looked! How preposterous! How perfectly fantastic! It's as if the Good News of Easter simply can't stand still! Once the realization of our Divine Creator's undying love for this world, and for *us*, begins to sink-in, we discover that it's something we cannot keep buried inside. It grabs hold of our heart, moves into our head, our hands, our feet, and throughout our entire being - until we are moved to take action!

The Good News of Easter *is* a living, moving, growing and evolving reality! And at the heart of that Good News is the essential fact that you can't put Jesus Christ in a box, and simply stick him on the shelf. It's been tried before and continues to be tried, but it will not succeed. In spite of being nailed to a cross; in spite of that heavy stone sealing his tomb, Jesus Christ rises-up and continues to live. His message of Divine Love will not be tucked-away in tidy theological writings or carefully crafted creeds. Nor can it be confined by the parameters of our personal prejudices, religious rules, or self-imposed boundaries. Jesus refuses to relinquish or curtail that inclusive message of Divine Compassion, regardless of the cost. It is a message which cannot be conquered by death, trapped in a tomb, frozen in time, *or* simply summed-up in a Sunday sermon! This makes preaching the Easter Message - and witnessing to our Faith - both challenging, and extremely exciting!

It's exciting because we proclaim a *Risen* Christ - One who was dead and buried, yet is alive and active in this world. And this is where the challenge comes in, because we're not talking about some lifeless or limited commodity! To have faith in a Living Savior means that our faith itself must be living and growing, active and moving ever-forward.

Our Faith contains surprises and wonder, mystery and amazement - as the Living Christ continues to encounter different people, in uniquely different ways. Which is why my Easter message for you today, is to tell you that *you* are the Easter message!

You and I have amazing news to share - *Good News* which is intended for all kinds of people with all kinds of problems and pains, hopes and histories, lives and lifestyles. And just as we cannot contain and control Jesus Christ, we also can't limit or reduce the wide spectrum of people who Jesus so graciously welcomes and affirms. The Good News isn't just for those who grew up in a particular culture or religion. It's not limited by race or gender, social status or personal preference. That's what makes it *Good*, and that is what makes it *News*. It's a refreshingly *new* way of understanding the goodness and graciousness of the Holy One, who embraces and loves us all.

In and through the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Holy One displays an unstoppable love - one which always finds a way to break through the barriers that people set up. A love that in the person of Jesus boldly reaches out to the poor and the oppressed, the outcast and the outsider. A love that doesn't stop, even when threatened by dangerous religious and political leaders. A love that takes on the pain of betrayal and rejection, suffering and death; yet still refuses to die!

When those first believers said that they were witnesses of the Resurrection, they weren't claiming that they witnessed an *event*, in one specific moment of time. As far as we know, there were no eye-witnesses to that particular phenomenon. Therefore, a witness of the Resurrection can be anyone who comes face to face with the reality of Christ's Life-changing Love. And that can happen at an empty tomb, or a locked upper room; on the road to Emmaus, or the road to Damascus. It can even happen on Royalton Road in Brecksville, Ohio! In today's Continuing Testament Alan Brehm writes, "How do we encounter the Risen Christ today? For me, I experience God's love...through the Presence of Christ in the community of faith. I experience [it] through the love, support and affirmation I receive from

other people who have experienced that life and love, and have come away from that experience transformed.”

On this Easter morning, Jesus Christ can touch and transform *us* - as we hear the Good News, as we share the Bread and Cup, and as we convey to one another that same compassion and concern, love and grace that Jesus Christ shows us all. Together, you and I are the living, growing, ever-expanding expression of a Love that cannot be stopped, and a Life which will not be buried. Today, we remember and celebrate the wonderful story of Christ' Resurrection. Tomorrow - and every day - you and I can continue to live-out that story. We can feed the hungry, comfort the afflicted, stand-up for the vulnerable and the oppressed, and warmly welcome the lonely and the lost.

So...put on your running shoes, and get ready to take action!