

Easter, 2019

Ephesians 3:18-21, John 20:1-16

Center Church, Hartford

April 21, 2019

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Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia!

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge. (Ephesians 3:18-19) Did you hear that?

That's where Easter starts for us, I think. Not with trying to figure out the logistics and biology of how Jesus' body came alive again, or whether it was a physical or spiritual resurrection. Whatever happened that day, whatever Mary and later the disciples and others experienced, they did not spend time trying to figure it out logistically, rather they entered into it fully; it surpassed knowledge. They received this holy surprise with amazement and a little fear until they understood it was about love. Love broader than betrayal. Love longer than a crossbeam. Love higher than human hate or greed or fear or violence. Love deeper than they could ask or imagine. Love that came when what was deserved by the world was punishment, retaliation, retribution, holy anger. Love that defies logic or the boundaries we carefully construct around who deserves our self-limited version of love.

It's hard to believe anyone could love human beings that much. But the first gift of the resurrection is the call to believe that, as the apostle Paul wrote elsewhere: "**nothing** can separate us from the love of God. Neither death nor life nor angels nor human rulers, nor past, present, or future, nor any power of earth nor the highest mountain or the deepest sea, NOTHING will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus!" (Romans 8:38-39)

I saw, in the paper this week, that a group of adults and children painted a large mural on a street in Hartford where children walk to school, with the words "You Are Loved." I thought that was sad and wonderful all at the same time. Sad that we feel a need to remind any child that they are loved, that there are children anywhere who don't know the fullness of that love in the air they breathe every day. But this is also wonderful because I feel that everyone who walks or drives over this gets a reminder. You are loved.

This holy and wholly surprising love, God's love, is powerful enough to overcome death, to burst through the stone of a tomb, to fill human beings with power for loving, something that they thought was impossible. More than they could imagine. More than they would dare to ask.

There's a great scene in the film *The Empire Strikes Back* (you knew I had to have a Star Wars reference this morning!) when the great but tiny Jedi Master Yoda (remember, little guy, kind of a cross between ET and a frog) is teaching Luke Skywalker how to access the power of the Force within him. It's there, but Luke doesn't believe it is as strong as Yoda keeps saying it is. Yoda pinches Luke and says "Luminous beings are we; not this crude matter!"

Luminous beings are we, are you, am I, are those children who walk across that mural and the adults driving cars across it on the way to work in worry or struggle or joy. Luminous beings, who, so often, feel held down by this crude matter and forget the power within us. Jesus wasn't held down by it, because he lived in the fullness of divine love. As we heard in the letter to the Ephesians, "I pray that you...may know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." Luminous beings are we, the Body of Christ!, capable of being filled with all the fullness of God, who enables us to "accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine." Luminous beings are we.

When Jesus spoke Mary's name, everything changed for her in ways it would take a lifetime to understand. It began, however, with knowing through all her mind and body and spirit that she was loved. She could then live through that love, empowered by that love, to be a resurrection person her whole life.

Today, I pray that you may be rooted and grounded in love. That you may know, feel, believe the breadth, length, height, depth of the love of Christ, so that you may be filled with the fullness of God.

I heard a song, on Top 40 radio of all places, by a young artist named Lauren Daigle that says this brilliantly. At first, I thought it was a song about the love between two people; then I listened carefully. The "you" in the lyrics is God. The song is called "You Say." Listen.

*I keep fighting voices in my mind that say I'm not enough
Every single lie that tells me I will never measure up
Am I more than just the sum of every high and every low?
Remind me once again just who I am, because I need to know (ooh oh)*

You say I am loved when I can't feel a thing
You say I am strong when I think I am weak
You say I am held when I am falling short
When I don't belong, oh You say that I am Yours
And I believe (I), oh I believe (I)
What You say of me (I)
I believe
The only thing that matters now is everything You think of me
In You I find my worth, in You I find my identity, (ooh oh)
You say I am loved when I can't feel a thing
You say I am strong when I think I am weak
And You say I am held when I am falling short
When I don't belong, oh You say that I am Yours
And I believe (I), oh I believe (I)
What You say of me (I)
Oh, I believe
Taking all I have and now I'm laying it at Your feet
You have every failure God, and You'll have every victory, (ooh oh)
You say I am loved when I can't feel a thing
You say I am strong when I think I am weak
You say I am held when I am falling short
When I don't belong, oh You say that I am Yours
And I believe (I), oh I believe (I)
What You say of me (I)
I believe
Oh I believe (I), yes I believe (I)
What You say of me (I)
Oh I believe (oh)
(Songwriters: Paul Mabury / Lauren Ashley Daigle / Jason Ingram)

Luminous beings are we!

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