

First Lesson: Acts 10: 34-43
Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 15: 19-26
Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24
Gospel Lesson: Luke 24: 1-12

Easter Sunday
April 17, 2022

“Real Love”
Sermon by Pastor Paul Campbell
American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Grace and peace to you from Him who was, who is and who is to come, Jesus the Christ, our Lord. Amen.
Happy Easter, Christ is risen indeed!

We are experiencing real love. And we have to ask ourselves the question, ‘How do we know that Christ is risen?’ We know because we are real Easter people. People who love unconditionally, and people who have been loved unconditionally.

Early in my pastor/preacher career I felt that the sermon for Easter was the toughest to write. We have the scripture, we have amazing music, all that tells the story. The hymns tell the story, the whole scene tells the story, and it goes beyond that. Easter is real, and we reflect on the empty tomb. Death will not win, we know that.

We as Easter people believe that sometimes when we are difficult to love, or even when others are difficult to love, we still love and we still are loved by God. We are Easter people. Love is real. We know that. Love, unconditionally. So over the years I have adjusted my expectations of my sermon, so I hope you are with me on this one.

What I have decided to do over the years is try to give a message using alliteration, nuggets and nuances. So today I am just going to give you one *nugget* that may be new to some of you – unless you know Greek, and then it’s a nuance, which is more in the public arena. But we will see how that goes. First of all we look at the angel in the tomb, and we see the women in the tomb, and it’s always helpful in my mind when studying scripture, especially the Gospels, that we have to compare the different accounts, especially the synoptic gospels. We have Matthew, Mark, and Luke, who all wrote around the same time, but come with different perspectives. We are going to look at Matthew, and Mark.

We know from their language and from who they are talking to that they are Jewish and they are speaking to a Jewish audience. We know that because what they say in Matthew and Mark, in the tomb experience, is they tell the women to go to Galilee. Now Galilee is where Jesus, the Jew, spent most of his time as a Jewish minister in effect, and preacher. So that’s a Jewish perspective. And that’s all fine. In Luke, the women in the tomb are told to remember, to remember what Jesus told them, and they *did* remember, and then they went back to the disciples, the men, who were all hiding, because they were not nearly as courageous as the women, and they didn’t believe them anyway.

Remember is an interesting word in New Testament Greek, because in Luke “Manama” – which is the word for tomb – is also the word for remembrance. It’s the same word, two different translations, two different meanings, tomb and remembrance. Remember is the key thing here. Keep the memory of those people who were in the tomb, or in the grave, or in the columbarium. Keep that love, that memory alive.

Every time my wife and I drive to Minnesota, we always stop at a cemetery in Omaha, where many of her family members are buried. We go to their graves, and we remember. And then sometimes members of the family join us, and they remember. And sometimes the details don’t match, but that doesn’t really matter.

What does matter is that there is love. And through that memory, through that telling the stories and laughing and crying, we are telling the story of that love. Unconditional love.

God loves us, as shown in the empty tomb. We remember that story well, and that's why we come together every Easter.

I remember another story called "The Velveteen Rabbit". How many of you have read this? It was published in 1922, and in 2007 the National Educational Association named it one of teachers' top 100 books for children. It is a wonderful story. It's about a little boy on Christmas and he's getting gifts, and the first gift he gets is a stuffed rabbit, a velveteen rabbit. And he loves the rabbit, it's soft, it's fluffy, it's squeezable. He loves the rabbit until he gets more toys. He gets toys that wind up, walk around and make noise, all sorts of exciting things for a little boy. And so he forgets about the rabbit.

He usually slept with one of these wind-up toys, and one night in the nursery he couldn't find that toy. The nanny who was there became very frustrated, so she just gave him the rabbit. At first it was very uncomfortable for the rabbit, but pretty soon he began to love being squeezed by that boy. And the little boy loved squeezing the rabbit. Well, the boy got scarlet fever, and was really quite sick. So in his recovery what they had to do was take everything in the nursery, and burn it, to kill the germs. But the nursery fairy came, and she saved the rabbit before he could be burned. And the rabbit and the fairy talked for a while.

The rabbit asked, "Am I real, was I real to the boy?" And the fairy said, "You were real to the boy, but now you are real to everyone." And that's because the boy's memory of the rabbit who helped him so much get to sleep, and he snuggled with him so much. He still loved the rabbit. And the rabbit became real. And so the end of the story is, the rabbit is in the garden but he doesn't look like the normal rabbit. His hair is a little thin because he was rubbed so well, and his stuffing was rearranged a little bit. I can relate to all these things. But he was real. And the little boy recognized him, and they loved each other.

Remembering to tell stories about our loved ones, remembering to tell stories whether they are all factual or not really doesn't matter. But remembering and telling stories about love are so important to our lives. So important to our lives. Just one more note, a Greek note, in Greek there are three words for love, there is eros, which romantic/sexual love, there is philia, brotherly love/love in a family, and then there is agape. And that is God's love. That is love unconditionally, that's like that boy and the rabbit, unconditional love, and that is what we have with God.

So that nugget I said I would give you is the whole idea about the tomb and remembering. Think about this when you think about people who aren't at your Easter table. People that used to be there. Remember, and that is very, very special. And then think about where you have been and where you are going and take a cue from those celestial beings at the tomb. Remember that memories are very, very powerful. And let's embrace agape love this Easter. Let's embrace love unconditionally. Let's just love. Remembering and loving, we know that we have agape love from our God.

And that's the good news.
Amen.