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**Church of the Beatitudes United Church of Christ**

Look For the Living Among the Living

*A Sermon by*

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Scripture: Luke 24:1-12

April 4, 2010

North Dakota leads the country in the growing and harvesting of sunflowers. United States farmers from the western plains states to the panhandle of Texas have invested in sunflower production as a cash crop. Sunflowers have a short growing season. Sunflowers work well as a full season crop in rotation with corn, soybeans, and/or sorghum. Demand is high for sunflower oil, sunflower seeds, and use in birdseed. And the sight of hundreds of acres of blooming sunflowers is one of the most beautiful sights.

Sunflowers are heliotropic, that is, sunflower heads turn with, or track, the sun, early in their development. Planted in rows north and south, the sunflowers turn their heads toward the sun. The motion is performed by motor cells in a flexible segment just below the flower which pumps potassium ions into nearby tissues, changing their turgor pressure.<sup>1</sup> Only later in their development, do they stay east-facing before facing downwards.<sup>2</sup> Now there's something you always wanted to know!

While sunflowers fascinate me, people fascinate me even more. For don't you think, people are also heliotropic? Don't you think that we have some small motor cells somewhere in our bodies, maybe in our brains, our psyches, our wounded hearts, some small processes going on within us whereby we turn our faces toward the light? I would say that when we are at our best, we turn our faces toward the light. When we are at our best, we follow the light. We thrive and grow in the light. Why would we not seek to follow the light?

Think about it. One person praises us and we light up, we feel good about ourselves, we can take the next step, we can go on. Everything is possible. The opposite is also true. One person hurts us, we feel badly about ourselves, and it is so much harder to take that next step.

This was what Luke was saying in his Gospel story. Written 60 years, two to three generations after the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, Luke is still trying to draw people to face the light. There were still many in Luke's day who still said "it is an idle tale". A more accurate translating of the words "an idle tale" is these women are "raving lunatics."

I don't think they were raving lunatics. I think the women who went to the tomb in the heart of darkness were Heliotropic. I think they were seeking the light. Everyone else was saying it was over. It had been a terrible week that had ended with violence and death. A crowd once cheering, had turned its face from the sun and became the crowd that chanted, "Crucify him." It was because of the kindness of only one man, the Gospel of Luke tells us, Joseph of Arimathea, who went back to Pilate and asked for the body and who lovingly wrapped Jesus and laid him in the tomb. Where were the multitudes of disciples then? Where were the people throwing down their cloaks to welcome the Messiah, the Anointed One? When one of our readers read on Maundy Thursday the words before today's tomb story, I heard something again for the first time. "Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the Council, had not agreed to their plan and action.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heliotropism>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.jeffersoninstitute.org/pubs/sunflower.shtml>

He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God.”

Would not that be a wonderful epitaph, engraving on our tombstones: Nancy Nelson Elsenheimer: waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God.

Church of the Beatitudes: waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God.

Insert your own name: waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God.

And waiting here is the Biblical sense of waiting: actively waiting, doing something to make it happen, modeling, preaching, becoming, preparing the way for kingdom of God.

The women were waiting expectantly...first for the Sabbath to be over so that they could go and extend their final courtesy, to anoint Jesus’ body for burial. In times of sorrow, it often comforts us to feel we can do something, however small, to honor the memory of the one we mourn.<sup>3</sup>

But in the darkness before the dawn, as the women picked their way to the tomb, they did so knowing full well that Pilate’s soldiers could turn them away, or worse yet, do the same violence to them. The women could not do nothing. So, they turned their faces to the sun. They boldly, foolishly, expectantly walked into the tomb, where two strangely lit men said to them, “Remember. Remember what he said all those days he spent with you? Look for the living not here, but among the living.”

Look for the living among the living. Be heliotropic. Be a heliotrope.

Be a living example of Jesus: a person with integrity and joy, and the light will be drawn and shown through you.

Be a living example of Jesus: a person who sees need and tries to meet that need, and the light will be drawn and shown through you.

Be a living example of Jesus: forgive, hope, be generous in all things, big and small, and the light will be drawn and shown through you.

Be a living example of Jesus: look for the living, the good in all people and in all circumstances, and the light will be drawn and shown through you.

Do it often enough and do it long enough, this looking for the living among the living, and even that which was dead will come alive again.

People may laugh at you and say, “That’ll never work.” People may speak up in public about you and say, “That will cost too much. We can’t find that kind of money. Don’t you know we are in a

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.csec.org/csec/sermon/noren\\_3926.htm](http://www.csec.org/csec/sermon/noren_3926.htm)

recession?” People will shout, and some will curse you, even when they say they are on your team, and they will draw some people to them as well. People are heliotropic. They will turn their faces and their ear to what they think is the sun. But beware of false suns. Beware of those who yield false power, who like Pilate just two chapters ago, yielded to public opinion polls, and handed over Truth.

Resurrection is drawing people to the light and showing the light through our lives. Theologian Diana Butler Bass says, “The resurrection is not an intellectual puzzle. Rather it is a living theological reality, a distant event with continuing spiritual, human, and social consequences. The evidence for the resurrection is all around us. Not in some ancient text, Jesus’ bones, or a DNA sample. Rather, the historical evidence for the resurrection is Jesus living in us; it is the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, bringing back to life that which was dead. We are the evidence.”<sup>4</sup>

Soon our children will go out for an Easter egg hunt. That will take about 30 seconds. We will have communion, a bite and a sip that will remind us again that we are the evidence of the resurrection. We are the ones who become the heliotropes, the sunflowers, the followers of the Light. You know, I tried once to grow sunflowers, just a few of those seed packets. Tall ones, shorter ones, big, bold, beautiful sunflowers. It wasn’t my greatest success in gardening. It certainly was not a cash crop. But, in a garden, in a family, in a church, it only takes one or two sunflowers to brighten up the place.

Look for, better yet be, the living among the living. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> <sup>4</sup> [\[2\] Diana Butler Bass - http://www.beliefnet.com/blogs/godspolitics/2007/04/diana-butler-bass-believing.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/blogs/godspolitics/2007/04/diana-butler-bass-believing.html)