

## **Easter Makes a Difference**

By: Penny Holste

April 5, 2015. Easter changes everything between us and God. Pastor Penny preaches this Easter morning on Jesus' promise to be with us to the end of the world, and the forgiveness he died to give to everyone as a free gift.

\*\*\* Transcript \*\*\*

We begin this morning in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I have to wonder if some of us here this morning aren't feeling a little like the women did on the way to the tomb. They had just watched their friend and leader be killed, and their world had shaken. And they were very hopeless. And I think maybe, when I think over the year that we've had since last Easter, maybe some of us feel our world has shaken a little too. There was Ferguson, and then maybe people say the effect of Ferguson it seems renewed violence, renewed animosity between the races, between people and the police, and then somehow renewed animosity between the political parties. And then we hear about militants and violence all over the world, especially toward Christians, and we may feel our world has been shaken a little. And then adding to the hopelessness is the fact that we realize that part of the problem is with us, that we find it very hard to listen to people whose ideas are not like ours, that we are afraid of differences. We stick to stereotypes. In our fear we lose our way.

But we're here this morning. We're here faithfully, dutifully — just as the women faithfully, dutifully went to anoint the body. We're here. But maybe we're wondering can Easter really change anything? Well, the women soon discovered that Good Friday and Easter changed everything. It changed their lives. It changed the world. And in truth, it does change our lives. On Good Friday, they watched their good friend die. And they knew that he was going through physical pain, but did they know what was really happening on that cross? He was also going through the pain of forgiveness. Now, I think we all know the pain of forgiveness. It's very hard to let it go when someone has hurt you. You just feel like there should be some sort of revenge, or at least some sort of tearful apology. But to forgive, to just let it go, is painful. I always feel bad in the movie "Frozen" where the character Elsa sings "Let It Go," because precisely at that moment she isn't able to let it go. People have hurt her, and for things that were out of her control. And she's angry and she doesn't know what to do. So she sings the song, but it really doesn't help. She hasn't let it go because it's so painful.

When Jesus hung on that cross he was letting go of the sins, he was forgiving the sins of everyone that had come before him and everyone that would come after him, and it was painful. But the real forgiveness came three days later on Easter Sunday. That's when the forgiveness was finalized. You know, when Jesus rose from the dead, he did something that no one else has ever done: he came back to life and he stayed alive. He didn't die again. Some of you maybe have experienced, and I know people who have experienced, a medical death for a while, had near-death experiences. But when they came back to this life, we knew they would die again. But Jesus didn't. When he came back he had a different kind of a body. It wasn't that he was a vision. Many people saw him all together, and they saw the same thing. They could touch him, they could hear him. But his body seemed to be able to come and go mysteriously. And when he appeared to his friends sometimes and startled them, he always came with a word of peace. And then he always gave them some direction. And then he always ended by saying, "I will never leave you. I will be with you to the end of the world. And when you can no longer see me or touch me I will send the Holy Spirit. I will be with you." When Jesus rose from the dead he broke the

chokehold that sin and evil and violence and death have held on us. He showed that his love is stronger than sin or violence or even death. He promises that we too will have a resurrection.

Easter changed everything between us and God. Before Jesus, we were indebted to God and to one another for all our loveless acts and thoughts. We were in debt and we couldn't pay the debt off. We couldn't even pay the minimum. Our checks kept bouncing. And then Jesus came and he died to forgive all of the debt, completely, of everyone. Not just good people, but people who like violence — anyone from a classroom bully to someone on death row. He came and forgave everyone's sin. We read in the Bible, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." Or Paul tells us God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself and not counting their trespasses against them. So Jesus wiped away our debt, and then amazingly started pouring money into our account. So it just ran over with goodness. He gave us his largesse of forgiveness and love and strength. And he didn't do it just to people who pray to him. He didn't just give it to people who believe in him. He didn't just give it to people who try to lead a good life. He gave that wealth, that righteousness, to everyone as a free gift from his love.

So now the only question to ask is: how do we spend it? The young man at the tomb gave some direction to the women. He said, in so many words, go home and share the wealth. He said go home. He said go to Galilee, which was their home, and he said share this good news that Jesus is alive with Peter and the others.

This morning, Jesus wants us to know that Easter makes a difference. And he tells us just go home and share the wealth, go home to your family gatherings or the restaurant, go home next week to your work or school or retirement, go home to your community, go home to your city and be bridge builders. Reach out to people who are different. Listen to ideas you don't always agree with. Build bridges and forgive. Because this Easter, we have the confidence that we can be changed. We are not alone. As the women told the world, we are not alone because he is alive.

\*\*\* Keywords \*\*\*

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