

Date: Sunday April 4, 2010 (Easter)

Scripture: John 20:1-18

Title: “How Will It Turn Out?”

The Message of Scripture (Sermon Thesis): Just as the gospel story portrays, we don’t know how things will turn out.

The Sharing of the Good News (The Sermon Purpose): Live the good news of Jesus Christ’s resurrection.

(Remember, it’s all about God!)

One Easter morning, a young boy expressed his displeasure about going to church. His new shoes were pinching his toes. His tie was tight around his neck. And, the weather was simply too beautiful to waste a whole hour in church. He wanted to be playing ball.

Upon arriving, he slumped into the pews and wore a frown. Then, he muttered to his parents, “I don’t know why we have to go to church on Easter every year. They keep telling the same old story and it always the same (Dan Flanagan). I know how this is going to turn out.” Can anybody relate?

I know how it is going to turn out. So I like to think. I don’t usually watch a movie two times, because I know how it ends. I don’t usually reread a book, because I know what happens. I don’t like to take the same route on a trip, because I know how it goes.

I have a dear group of four friends from seminary and we have stayed in close touch since we have graduated. We email and call one another often, and try to get

together a couple of times a year. In fact, I will be seeing them all this week in St. Louis.

For the last two summers, at the end of August, the five of us have met at the Dubois Center, a UCC camp located just outside of Nashville, IL. We usually meet up on a Sunday afternoon and then head home Tuesday. These past two years we have been fortunate enough to meet when we have the entire camp to ourselves. That's good for us and it is good for others campers who have chosen not to be there when we are there.

Not that we are terribly rowdy bunch. Although we do enjoy good food, cool summer drinks, we laugh a lot, we talk about church members, oops, I mean we talk about being ministers, we listen to one another, and we even allow some time for Bible study and worship planning. It is forty-eight hours of fuel for life.

The first year we decided we would conclude our time together by walking the labyrinth located on the Dubois property. Now I know that many of you know what a labyrinth is, but some of you may not. Here's a brief description.

A labyrinth is a designated pattern which can be used to reflect upon life and faith. It can be compared to taking a journey. Some people think of a labyrinth as a maze. It is not. A maze will have dead ends. A labyrinth only has one way and it always leads to a center and then back out again.

There are different kinds of labyrinth designs. Some are in gardens, some can be found on the grounds of a church. There are portable labyrinths painted

on canvas that can be carried from place to place. Smaller labyrinths are made to use with fingers. Regardless of the style and design, walking the labyrinth is done purposefully with time to think, talk, and walk with God (Seasons of the Spirit).

The labyrinth at Dubois is outlined with boards and has rock for decoration spread throughout the path. It is in need of care and repair, but it serves the purpose. My seminary friends and I walked the labyrinth as we concluded that first year visiting. It was the right way to finish our time together.

This last August we met again. The suggestion was made to conclude by walking the labyrinth again. I said, “Wait a minute. We just did that last year. We know how that goes. It was a good finish, but we can’t duplicate that again this year.” However, being a person who likes to try and have solutions rather than just throwing out stop signs, since I didn’t have an option for us to consider for our conclusion, the group agreed we would again finish up with the labyrinth. That was the plan. I thought I knew how it would turn out.

So it was with Jesus’ disciples and friends that morning so long ago. They thought they knew how it would turn out. Up to the very end, they had expected that somehow Jesus would be spared that horrible death on the cross. Somehow, someone would come to rescue him. There would be some last moment pardon, so they thought.

It’s in our human nature to want that happy-ending. Many of our stories conclude just that way. Take Camelot, for example, when Gwenivere is taken out

to be burned at the stake. The volume of the music increases, there is the pounding of hooves from the horses, and we wait breathlessly wondering if Lancelot will make it. Of course he does, there is rescue, and that last minute reprieve for dear Gwenivere.

The disciples of Jesus had to be hoping that there would be a last minute reprieve for Jesus. Some band of good guys on thundering hooves. Or even that someone with power, like Pilate, would grant him a last minute release. But there was no release, rescue, or reprieve. Jesus died on the cross. It is not turning out as expected.

You see, Easter is so much more than we expect. All that the disciples expected from Easter morning is that Jesus would be rescued. But Jesus is not rescued from the pain and suffering of the Cross. Jesus is not spared the agony of death. Yes, it's horrible, but it's not the end. Instead, God brings new life. There is resurrection.

Think about it. When we face death or difficulty or pain, all we want is to be rescued. We dream of the thundering hooves and of being released from whatever might torment us. Instead, God comes, not with thundering hooves, but often in the midst of silence, moving away the heavy stones of our lives and bringing resurrection that only God can bring.

Now keep in mind resurrection is far different from rescue. Rescue is being free from the struggle, being rid of whatever it is that troubles us or bothers us.

Resurrection is far more than that. Resurrection is new life, a new kind of life, a life that is lived differently, with a new kind of aliveness toward God. That's how it turned out for the disciples.

That's the way it was for Ann, a woman who suffered from rheumatoid arthritis. She was never rescued from the pain of the disease. In fact, it got worse, she became bed-ridden, her life was filled with pain, and it eventually took her life.

But, resurrection cannot be stopped. God brought resurrection to Ann, and she lived a life very much alive to God, even though she had much pain. She began a prayer ministry from her bed. She spent her days on the phone, talking with, consoling, and comforting others who suffered any kind of pain. Ann prayed with them and for them. She spent hours in prayer, praying over pages of names daily. If you went to visit her, you always felt as if you were the one visited. You left her room feeling warm and loved, remembering her words and her smile (LaSalle). Ann lived an Easter story. We may know others who do as well. God may not rescue, but God will resurrect. The blessings of Ann live on to this day.

Things turn out differently than we expect. For those followers of Jesus on the first Easter in the ancient time, the days ahead would be more than they ever imagined. Things turned out differently than what I expected walking that labyrinth for the second time late last August. On a refreshing summer day, with the bright sun hanging over head, and the brilliance of a blue sky blessing our journey, five friends walked a labyrinth with a heightened sense of connectedness and fulfillment that had never been experienced before. And things turned out different than

expected for that little boy all buttoned up in church. One the way out the door, the pastor handed him a chocolate egg. He never thought it would turn out like that!

We don't know how things will turn out. That can be frightening or reassuring depending on our circumstances. But no matter our experience, with faith, trust, and belief in God, we can be assured that things will turn out greater than we expect. On this Easter Sunday, wherever we may be on our faith journey right now, let us live the good news of Jesus Christ's resurrection; a turn out made possible by God. Let us pray.

Lord,

We want to know how things turnout, so we often say. But we don't. We don't know and we don't always want to know. But this day, on this side of the cross, we know how the story of Jesus turns out, it goes on and on, and we are blessed by it. You make this possible and we give you thanks. We do so in Jesus name, Amen.

Offering: As a faith community living the story of Jesus resurrection, we rely on gifts given. Let us give knowing that the life of Christ goes on and on. The ushers will please . . .

Benediction: Spread the word, He lives! God makes all things new again. Go forth this day blessed by God - Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit! Amen and Amen.

Sources:

Flanagan, Dan; Lectionary Homiletics; www.goodpreacher.com; 2009.

Hearn La Salle, Janice; Lectionary Homiletics; www.goodpreacher.com; 2009.

"Seasons of the Spirit"; Logos Productions: Inver Grove Heights, MN; 2009.

