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First UMC

Springboro, Ohio

March 27, 2016

Easter Sunday

Scripture: Luke 24:1-12

Message: “What Are You Looking For?”

 So it’s Easter! After 40 long days of Lent, of self-reflection and discipline, it’s time to celebrate. Happy Easter!

 Today marks the beginning of 50 days of celebrating our Easter faith. One of the ways that we’ll continue the celebration is with our Easter party and Easter Egg Hunt next Sunday. I hope you will join us.

 Easter egg hunts were begun in the US in the 1700’s. The tradition came from the Germans who settled in Pennsylvania. They thought of both bunnies and eggs as symbols of new life and so they worked well with both the spring equinox and the Christian celebration of new life, Easter.

 The tradition has gone through various changes. It started with making nests for the bunny outside of your front door. The bunny would come and leave hard boiled eggs in the nest. They were welcomed because they were often one of the items given up during Lent.

 Now children are a bit offended at the idea of finding hard boiled eggs. They are nice to color, but chocolate and skittles inside of plastic eggs are at the top of egg hunters lists.

 Now it’s Easter, so I don’t want to be too controversial. I wouldn’t want to start a family fight over Easter brunch, but as we watch Easter egg hunts today, we might wonder if they have gotten too easy? Maybe that bunny has gotten a little lazy? Where has the ‘hunt’ part of it gone?

 If you’ve been to an Easter egg hunt recently, you’ll see hundreds of eggs laid out in plain sight. In some cases thousands of eggs dropped from helicopters. They even mow the grass beforehand so that they are easier to see.

 It’s so easy that the kids line up on one end of the field and the whole thing is done in just a few minutes. You don’t have to worry about any eggs being missed.

 When I was younger, the hiding and the hunting was the best part. It didn’t matter whether the eggs had candy in them. My brother, sister, and I would hide and hunt the empty eggs over and over, each trying to find harder spots when it was our turn. Sometimes we’d do such a good job that we wouldn’t find that last egg until summer.

 Of course as we think about the very first Easter hunt, it wasn’t for eggs, and it wasn’t an easy one.

 Early that first morning, the women rose with that nauseous feeling of grief and dread in the pit of their stomach. They knew what they had to do, yet it didn’t seem real. It was all too horrible.

 They thought that they knew what they were looking for. They thought they knew what they would find. They would find a tomb sealed with a large stone. They would find a tomb filled with death. They would find Jesus’ body and anoint it.

 But as they arrived at the tomb that day, they found something completely different. They found that the stone had been rolled away. They found a tomb that was empty. They found angels telling them that Jesus had risen to look for Jesus among the living.

 They found a whole different hunt. God had upped the game. And they took up the challenge, looking for the risen Christ and for a new kind of life—resurrection life.

 So this Easter, as we think about egg hunts and that first hunt for the risen Christ, who does that connect with our life? What are you hunting for this Easter? What are you looking for today? As you come to the tomb, to this amazing story, to this Easter service today, what do you hope to find?

 If it was Easter flowers, you can check that off the list. If it is singing “Christ the Lord is Risen Today,” you can check that off the list. If it’s hearing the sacred story, check.

 But perhaps God has raised the bar for our hunt today. Perhaps God wants us to look a little harder and find something profound for us.

 It is my guess that if you go a little deeper, beneath the surface, you might be hoping to find something more profound. Something more than that which is over and done with, a Jesus of the past…good guy, great teacher, glad we knew him, sad he’s gone. Something more than accepting things the way they are, full of division, disillusionment, and death.

 If we look a little harder, we might find in Easter, the things we really long for deep in our hearts. What we are really looking for are things like peace and possibility, passion and purpose. And the hunt for these things begins at the tomb.

 First as we come to the tomb, we find new possibilities. What we thought was set in stone is no longer the case. God can and will roll the heaviest stones in your life away and do new things by the power of His life giving love.

 Today I invite you to look for the stones in your life, those things that seem impossible, and to give them to God. For we find at the tomb that with God, all things are possible.

 As we find the stones rolled away, then we are invited to come to peace with the fact that the tomb is empty. This sounds easy, probably because we’ve heard the story so often. But often when we are faced with new life, new possibilities, change, it is hard. Sometimes death seems easier because you can count on it. But death is never peaceful unless you know that it doesn’t have the final say. When you can face death, look it in the eye, and then face the empty tomb and new life on the other side, you find an amazing sense of peace.

 Just as you come to peace with the empty tomb, the angels begin to nag, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? Don’t you remember what he told you?”

 Too often we look for a different outcome by doing the same things, by looking in the same places, by reinforcing what we already know. The angels remind us to look at things differently. They remind us to look for and practice life rather than death, to focus on what God can do rather than what we can’t do, to shift our focus from serving ourselves to serving others, to not get stuck in our own expectations but to remember what Jesus has told us and done for us.

 The angels remind us that our purpose is to look for the living Christ and signs of his resurrection around us. And then to name them, to invest in them, to believe in them. And to share what we have experienced with others, and to keep doing so even when they think we’re crazy. The women went and told the other disciples. They called it an ‘idle tale.’ But Peter went to see.

 And even if our testimony helps one person to look a little closer and to find new possibilities and peace, in Jesus Christ, then we have fulfilled our purpose.

 And this then gives us passion to live this way of life that knows that there is one who loves you so passionately that he is completely focused on his purpose. He doesn’t stop when he faces an angry crowd, or death on a cross, or a tomb, or even hell. His love overcomes all of these obstacles so that we might be reconciled, one with God.

 And we then seek to love God with this same focus and passion and to love others in the same way that we have been loved.

 This Easter, here at the tomb, may we look a little closer, hunt a little harder, may we follow the words of the angels and Jesus, and look for these amazing gifts in places that are surprising, that we wouldn’t usually look.

 And when we do, we might just find what we’re truly looking for.