

THE SOURCE OF COURAGE

TEXT: LUKE 24:1-12

Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church

EASTER

APRIL 16, 1995

Kent Clise

PRAYER:

**Glory to You O God; on this day you won the victory over death,
You raised Jesus from the grave and given us eternal life. Amen.**

INTRODUCTION:

In the corner of our yard there is a small cluster of crocus. Weeks ago, as I cleared that area in a light snow squall, I found the blossoms. I had no new idea. But I could not resist the thought which I have considered many times, ever since I saw my first crocus in St. Louis, on the 19th of January 1968 as Paula and I saw the first home that we would share in ministry.

How small crocus are against the world in which they live! How courageous they are to come up in such cold weather!

Up and out of the darkness they are called to spread beauty in a world that is not all that friendly. A crocus will stand up to the elements no matter how threatening, chilly and foreboding the elements are.

Crocus always remind me of the human condition. We are called out of the darkness to spread beauty and reveal radiance in a world that can be hostile.

Now where does the crocus find its courage? Its courage comes from God. Paul tells us (I Cor. 15) as each seed is planted it will grow according to the Laws of God. When the crocus blossoms, it does so in accordance with the Will of God!

What is the source of our courage? It is the Easter message of salvation! It is the message; Jesus Christ is Risen! The three dark days are over, and Christ is Risen!

BODY:

In our lesson, when the disciples knew that their Lord was alright, they stood up in the darkness and went on with God.

I want you to know on this Easter Day, God is. I want us to stand up to the chill and the darkness and continue to live! We are joint heirs of the greatest source of courage; God Almighty as revealed in the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ!

The eleven surviving disciples have just been told in the announcement by the women who loved Jesus; Christ's tomb is empty, it is true God is real; and even though Christ had died, he was alright!

Recently I mentioned the death of my mother, the Monday after mother's day, in 1982. I knew about 3:45 p.m. that she had become ill, and was taken to Methodist Hospital. At about 4:15, the doctors and I talked and she had been pronounced dead. At 7:00 p.m. that evening I was to coach my son's soccer game. I did not know if I should leave immediately for Indianapolis, or coach the game. I took a walk in the woods near our home, and just as clear as the bells of Westminster Abbey, I heard my mother say to me, "Kent, do not worry about me. I am fine. I am with God. This was a good day to die!"

Those words gave me hope. I coached that night, and travelled the next morning.

What I am talking about is the hope to face the losses of this life! There are many unnamed losses occasioned by events, other than death, about which we might speak. Easter isn't a day for losses. Easter is a day for finding the courage for new life! We are talking about the courage of a confident expectancy to face significant and irreversible losses of life and continue to live.

The theologian, Jurgen Moltmann observes, that we come to know the truth and the value of courage when,

"We are forced to stand our ground against despair!"

We come to know the power of courage when it keeps us alive in the face of death.

Confidence in God, and trust in the well-being of our loved ones lost to us, is the exercise of Easter Faith. Faith is built upon the assumption of hope. Hope has its roots in God and it squares with what we know about God.

James L. Kidd is the pastor of the Asylum Hill Congregational Church in Hartford, Connecticut. He tells a story about a wonderful dream his wife had shortly after her mother had died. In the dream, her deceased father and their oldest son (who had died earlier) were playing a game of heavenly chess, just as they had done on earth. When Grandmother arrived, she stood beside them, at first ignored, because they were engrossed in their game. But when Bruce, who was still thirteen in death, recognized his grandmother, he put aside the chess board, and pulled out a deck of cards, and dealt her into the game.

Pastor Kidd draws this meaning from his wife's dream. "Our hope is that when life is over we have a building of God not made with hands, and when we get there, God will deal us in!"

Something akin to this hope is the source of our courage, and it will make all the difference in the world.

One of the great things about our faith is that we are not alone in it.

If I am the only person who saw the son rise this morning, then I might doubt my experience and call myself the victim of an illusion. But If I hear that many people in different countries and of varied intellectual; powers, have seen the same thing, and if I am told that men and women have laid down their lives rather than deny it, then my doubt vanishes, and I am sure of myself."

We are not the only ones to see the son rise. We are not the only ones to receive a resounding "Yes!" to our questions about God and the dead. We are not alone!

CONCLUSION:

Let me share with you a true story about a little boy named Stephen who came as close as anyone has in creating a fresh contemporary symbol of courage in the Easter Faith.

Stephen was 10 years-old, and mentally disabled. His retardation was worsening

and becoming noticeable to his classmates in Sunday School. Stephen's teacher was becoming more sensitive and concerned about how his classmates would treat him as his behavior changed. Would normal fourth graders continue to care about him as they came to see his differences?

With Easter approaching, the Sunday School teacher asked all eight children in the class to hide within an empty "Leggs" pantyhose container one small object which represented to them the new life of Easter.

The next week, fearing that Stephen might not have caught on, and not wanting to embarrass him, the teacher had the children place all the containers unlabeled on her desk, so she could open them one by one. Out of the first came a tiny flower. "What a lovely sign of new life!" said the encouraging teacher. Mindy could not help herself, she erupted, "teacher, that one is mine!"

Next came a rock! That one must be Stephen's, the teacher thought, since rocks don't symbolize new life. But just then, Billy shouted that his rock had moss on it and the moss represented the new life of spring! The teacher quickly agreed.

A butterfly flew from the third container, and little Lori bragged that her choice was the best sign. The fourth container was opened, but there was nothing inside of it. The teacher thought, this one is Stephen's, and she quickly moved on to the next container.

But Stephen interjected quickly, "Please don't skip mine!"

"But Stephen, it is empty!" "That is right!" "The tomb where they put Jesus was empty, and that means new life for everyone!" We don't ever need to be afraid!

Later that summer Stephen's condition worsened and he died. In his last days he told his Sunday School teacher he was going to die. He was not afraid to die, because he knew Jesus was no longer in the tomb, and Jesus would be there to take care of him. Jesus would take him home to heaven. At his funeral, carefully placed on the top of his casket, next to a floral spray, were eight "Leggs" pantyhose containers, each opened, and each empty.

The stark reality of death and the harshness of life continue to surround us. Yet, in the midst of the darkness comes Easter. The empty tomb is a durable symbol of hope.

To be sure, Easter and the Resurrection don't answer all the "why" questions. We can live with a lot of why questions unanswered when we are convinced of the hope of Easter. The hope of Easter is the source of our courage!