

THE BELOVED DISCIPLE
Easter Sunday –April 16, 2017 –John 19: 25-27 & 20: 1-10
The Church of the Covenant

Last Easter Sunday was the last Sunday my Mother and Dad attended church together. This Easter Sunday is the first that my Dad is attending Easter services in heaven, at the foot of Jesus, in the light of glory and the presence of the Lord forever. So for me this Easter is very personal and very poignant. It is a time to thank Jesus for the gift HE has given us of eternal life. It is the reminder that whatever else we face in life we have a promise of an empty tomb and a life that ultimately will never taste death, because HE lives!!!! “Because I live” promises Jesus, “You shall live also!” I do not know how people face the death of a loved one without faith in Christ. I do not know how people could hope to make it through without Jesus, or belief in someONE beyond themselves, or, for that matter, of being a member of a loving, supportive church family. I don’t know how people think they can make it through that sort of time alone without knowing in their heart that they are THE BELOVED DISCIPLE and that Jesus loves them and that His love for us “never ends”.

Pastor Kay and I have been preaching throughout Lent on the theme “Faces at the Cross” and now I shift our focus from the CROSS to being a “Face by the Garden Tomb”. Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when HE raised up from the dead? Were you there? Were you a face at the foot of the cross? Are you a face by the OPEN TOMB today as a witness of what God has done in raising up Jesus from the dead????

It is interesting to me that only the Gospel writer John notes that he, John, was both at the foot of the cross on Good Friday AND at the Garden Tomb on Easter Sunday. The other three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, do not note that he was there. But the phrase that John uses, both at the foot of the cross and also by the Empty Tomb of Easter is *“the disciple whom Jesus loves”* (John 19: 26 and John 20: 2) The Gospel writer John alone of the four gospels notes the presence of “The Beloved Disciple”. Now John is referred to as the “Spiritual Gospel”; the other three as the Synoptic Gospels. And what I want to suggest to you today is that the figure of The Beloved Disciple, “the one whom Jesus loved”, is an archetype figure, a spiritual figure representing all disciples of every time and age and place. I don’t mean to suggest that John literally wasn’t there. I want to suggest this --The beloved disciple is at the foot of the cross --so YOU are there at the foot of the cross, a personal witness of what happened on Good Friday at Calvary. The Beloved Disciple is by the open, empty Garden Tomb --so YOU are there in the Garden on that very first Easter. Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Yes, you are there. Were you there when they rolled away the stone? When Jesus raised up from the dead? Yes, you are there. All disciples of every time and place are there. You are there. We are there. A vast multitude without number are there. My Dad is there. And I am there. For WE ARE ALL OF US, The Beloved Disciple.

When we stand at the foot of the cross as the Beloved Disciple, we see how our sin has nailed our Savior there. Our heart is broken and our Spirit moved. We repent and we turn more and more to God through what Jesus Christ has done for us at Calvary. We love Jesus because He first loved us. The things of this world grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace as we stand by the foot of His cross and we look up into the love written on His face. We are The Beloved Disciple. We are the ones whom Jesus loves. His love compels us and demands our heart. His love transforms us. The love poured out at Calvary demands our heart, our soul, our all. Were you there? We are there. For we are The Beloved Disciple.

When we stand by the open, empty Garden Tomb where the formerly dead body of Jesus rested, but where HE was raised from the dead, Imperishable and forever, we see how there is nothing in life we cannot face because of the power of the resurrection released for us and active and present in our lives today. Our heart, broken at Calvary, is restored and strengthened by the Garden Tomb. We can rejoice in the midst of our trials. We can have joy in the midst of our pain. We can have victory in the midst of every loss in life. Because of the victory won by Jesus at that very first Easter. We reach the Garden Tomb first. We look in to see the miracle wrought by God’s love. “He is not here, He is risen just as He said!” We now completely understand that indeed we are The Beloved Disciple and that ultimately there is nothing in this life that can harm us, no, not even death itself. Victory in Jesus. A crown of eternal life because of a cross He has born for us. We are the Beloved Disciple. He

loves us so much that HE has conquered even the last enemy which is death. Were you there? We are there. For we are The Beloved Disciple.

The experience of grief and loss in life is like this. We bounce between the cross and the open tomb. We waver between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Our emotions, our all too human emotions, vacillate between the pain and the victory, the unbelief and the belief, the doubt and the promise. The pain in our heart has us understand the pain Jesus bore for us on the cross. But the hope in our soul has us hope in an eternal victory that Jesus has won for us through the resurrection, through a POWER released into the world, that even death itself cannot contain. We believe; Lord, help Thou our unbelief. We want to trust in You, Lord; but we waver at the foot of the crosses we ourselves bear in life. We know the promise of eternal life in Your Son is true, but we also grieve and are in pain and can even come to times of despair. We know we should laugh by the Garden Tomb, but instead we still weep by Calvary. We give it to God, but then in our weak humanity, we take it back. We waver between the cross and the victory over the grave. And all of that is OK, because God knows us, He knows our weaknesses, He has experienced them Himself through His only begotten Son, Jesus. Here is the spiritual dynamic in grief and loss...

You give it to God and you take it back. And you give it to God and you take it back. And you give it to God and you take it back. We humans always do. But one day you notice that your grief is going away. And that you see the hand of mercy more and more at work; and you feel the pain of loss a little less. And grace breaks through a little more. And one day you awaken to discover that you have victory over the stone-cold grief of loss. Grief carries for the night but JOY comes with an Easter morning. It has been said: time heals all wounds. No, time doesn't. Only the Lord Jesus Christ does!

But here is the point. In the midst of whatever heart pain we face in life, in the midst of our own personal Calvarys, still and always and forever, we remain The Beloved Disciple. He loves us today wherever we are in relation to Him. He loves us when we feel victorious. He loves us when we are in despair at the lowest moments in the cross we bear in life. We are there. Ah, BUT HE IS THERE. He loves us. His love never fails, never wavers, never gives up, never ends, never falters. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee", promises the Lord. He did not leave us nor forsake us at Calvary. He did not leave us nor forsake us at the Garden Tomb. His love for us is the one singular constant in our life. Whether in life or in death, whether in the crosses or the victories of life, His love remains the same. And we are always, today, tomorrow and forever, His BELOVED DISCIPLE. It is the hope of Easter!

Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Yes, because we are HIS Beloved Disciples. Were you there when they rolled away the stone? Yes, because we are His Beloved Disciple. Were you there when HE raised up from the dead? Yes, because we are His Beloved Disciples.

We are witnesses to the power of the resurrection in Jesus Christ. We have seen the Lord. The Beloved Disciple when he arrived first at the Open Tomb on that first Easter, as the Bible says, "saw and believed" (John 20: 10) Beloved Disciple, have you seen the risen Jesus my Lord, today?????

Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ today! Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*

This sermon is dedicated to my Dad, Harry R. Broberg, Witness to the Resurrection, as he dances in heaven on Easter Sunday and to the hope we always have in a risen Savior!