

BIBLE READING: John 20:1-18

SERMON

In Sarajevo, on May 27, 1992, at 4:00 in the afternoon, a line of starving people formed outside a bakery hoping to get bread. Without warning, a mortar shell fell in their midst killing 22 innocent civilians, some of them children.

Vedran Smailovic, the principal cellist of the Sarajevo Opera Orchestra, saw this from his window and knew he had to do something. He did the only thing he knew how to do: he played his music. The following day he went to the crater left by the blast and sat down and took out his bow and played his cello. For 22 days, one day for each of those who had perished needlessly, he played Albinoni's Adagio in G Minor.

Vedran Smailovic, was a symbol of peace in the midst of war and bloodshed. His playing was a sign of beauty in the midst of the ugly horror of war and his courage a symbol of the spirit of oppressed peoples everywhere and their desire for lasting peace.

Twenty-nine years later, there are not that many who remember the courage of Vedran Smailovic - yet what he did reminds me of the task of all those who follow the Prince of peace. We are called to bring Jesus' message of life and grace to a violent suffering indifferent world - even though many times we seem to be making little headway in transforming our world.

When we as Christians celebrate Easter we make a number of statements. We proclaim to the world that death and despair do not have the last word. We proclaim that horror and fear and social and political intimidation do not have the last word. We proclaim that our God is a God of LIFE and hope and beauty and peace. We proclaim our belief that good has triumphed over evil. We proclaim that might is not right and that self-giving triumphs over self serving. In proclaiming Easter we proclaim a set of values that the world does not even recognise, a set of values to which the world is even hostile.

The same forces which crucified Jesus are still active in our world; if we continue to blame it on Pilate or 'the Jews' then both the crucifixion and the resurrection lose their power.

The crucifixion speaks to all of those times in our lives when we deny that which gives us life, when we choose the easy way over the way of peace and justice.

The crucifixion speaks to all of those times when what has given us meaning and hope and purpose is gone from us. There are times when our hopes and dreams, our relationships - even our very lives are shattered and destroyed.

The resurrection speaks to all of those times when God continues to come to us despite all of our rejection; when God continues to empower and love and care for all of those we reject and persecute and belittle.

The resurrection speaks to us in all of those times when God finds us out in our brokenness, our despair and our hopelessness. Resurrection is a symbol of God's power to restore, transform and re-make.

The resurrection speaks to us every time we see even a glimpse of life where we thought none existed any longer.

The encounter with the risen Christ transformed the ragged band of followers from a place of fearful hiding to a group of fearless evangelists who risked everything to proclaim the good news.

Perhaps more important than the statements we make to the world are the statements we make to ourselves. When we most need a word of hope and life we can turn around and lift our eyes up and see our Saviour standing there. We can hear him calling our name and in that encounter we can be made whole and alive again. Even when we don't feel like it, and especially when we don't feel like it, the power of Easter is there for us, the power of our Easter God reaches out to us to give us LIFE in abundance.

The power of Easter is not so much that we will be restored but that we will be transformed.

The power of Easter does not deny the reality of death and despair but it does say that these things do not have the last word.

The power of Easter says that God has the last word. That LIFE in all of its fullness is granted to those who can step forward in faith and seek to trust in its promises.

May each of us lift up our eyes this morning and see and feel and taste the power of the resurrection.

Acknowledgement – Rev. Beth Johnston