# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“The Story of Easter”**

**John 20:1-10**

 **April 17, 2022**

The king who had entered Jerusalem triumphantly on what we refer to as Palm Sunday was by Friday evening a corpse in a tomb. Both his followers and his opponents believed it was over. His followers had hoped he was the promised Savior sent by God, but a dead man in a tomb can’t save anyone. His opponents had feared that his popularity would continue to grow out of control, putting their positions of influence in jeopardy, but a dead man in a tomb is a threat to no one’s authority. That’s the story on Friday afternoon and evening. But, Sunday is coming. Now, as Paul Harvey would say, it’s time for the rest of the story – it’s time for the story of Easter. Each of the four Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, tell the story, each in a slightly different way, including certain details and omitting others, but all agree on the fundamental truth of the story: the tomb is empty, for Jesus is risen from the dead. I invite you to turn with me to John’s account found in chapter 20 of his Gospel, verses one through ten

Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, “They have taken the Lord’s body out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn’t go in. Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, while the cloth that had covered Jesus’ head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed—for until then they still hadn’t understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. Then they went home.

Earlier in John’s Gospel, you have the record in chapter eleven of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. On that occasion, Jesus had said to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me shall live, even though he dies.” Then he said to her, “Do you believe this?”

That is what the story of Easter is asking each one of us this morning: “Do you believe this?” Do you believe that Jesus is alive, having risen from the grave, and do you believe that through him you also will live, even though you will one day die? Or, do you find the story of Easter merely to be of interest, an intriguing or informative or even inspirational tale, but not worthy of believing, not worthy of trusting as having anything to do with the eternal destiny of your soul? Perhaps you’re not sure what to believe, not only about the Easter story itself, but about life and death and eternity.

Harold Kushner wrote the book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* after the tragic death of his 14-year-old son. In it, he refutes the Christian claim of the God who is both all-powerful and the source of all good. He decided that either God is all-powerful but evil, allowing children to suffer and die, or God is weak but full of compassion for those who suffer. He chose the latter. Death, for Kushner and for many like him, is a power which is set over against a caring but impotent God. With Jesus dead in a tomb, with death all around us, including the deaths of friends and loved ones, what other conclusion can we draw than that God may be a loving God but death will have the final say?

On Sunday morning, God responded to the reality of death. Death was defeated as the victim of death was resurrected. God’s act restored life to Jesus, and through Jesus, life will be restored to all who believe in him. You and I possess no ability to survive the grave, no power to conquer its grip. But the Good News of the story of Easter is that the God who gave the gift of life to his Son, Jesus, offers that same gift to each one of us today. Do you believe this?