4/3/16 John 20:19-23 *Becoming More Like Christ* Deb Winters

When I was a child I can remember my parents watching the Steve Allen Show which had a segment in it called, “The Man On The Street” in which a reporter would ask people on the street (who were sometimes real people walking by on the street and sometimes actors) a simple question to get their views on various topics of the day.

In our modern technology world Mike is going to show for us a YouTube clip in the style of “The Man On The Street” in which a report asks people if they know what the meaning of Easter is (show clip):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0hed7BzIXg>

The Meaning of Easter,by Ted Graham

There is a sense of humor in this clip that they really don’t know the meaning of Easter although most of them had heard of Jesus. To me it is also a realization that the news reports of today are probably true, we are no longer a Christian nation and I believe part of that is our fault. We are afraid of telling our story, of sharing who Jesus is to us and what it means to follow Christ. It is almost as if we are no different than the followers of Christ in that Upper Room that first Easter evening.

They are all huddled together basically hiding there for fear of what the Roman and Jewish authorities might do to them if they found them. They might crucify them like they did their Lord and Savior Jesus. There had been reports of Jesus being alive, but I’m not sure any of them quite believed it yet and so they hid in fear trying to decide what to do next.

It is then Jesus appears to them and basically says, “Don’t be afraid” when he tells them “Peace be with you.” He proves he is Jesus by showing them his hands and side. He tells them what their next steps are as they cannot stay huddled in the upper room the rest of their lives in fear. It is time for them to go and tell the world what has happened.

In essence he commissions them telling them as God had sent him so he is now sending them and he gives them what I consider a secret weapon, the gift of the Holy Spirit. There are many ways to explain the Holy Spirit but for today let me give you the image of a GPS system, a Global Positioning System. In my book it is something we have needed for a while but it is not until the prophets we have come to realize it and desire it.

From the beginning of time according to the book of Genesis we were created in God’s image. And much like we do with children when we tell them when they are small, they are not to touch the oven, we know when they are older and able to understand we want them to learn how to use it properly. Most scholars feel that is the case in the story of the Garden of Eden. There were two trees they were not ready to deal with yet, but when the time was right, God may have taught us just like we teach our children.

The problem is just like our own children they want things now even when they may not be ready for it and Adam and Eve, with the serpent’s help, got ahead of God and ate the fruit of the tree of Good and Evil, the tree of knowledge. Throughout the Bible you see God patiently trying to teach us to help us understand this gift of knowledge we now have.

First God used according to the Bible one righteous man and his family, but Noah and his family still chose not to follow God. Then God chose one faithful man, but Abraham and his descendants still chose not to follow. God then sent Moses with some laws to help teach us how to live with God and each other, but we chose not to follow. Then through the judges and then kings who all chose not to follow even after God sent the prophets to try and keep them on course and told us that someday we would have God’s law written on our hearts.

Then God send his only child, Jesus. Jesus showed us what it means to follow God and what it means to use all of that knowledge we learned to truly love. In his death God gives us this gift we have come to call the Holy Spirit. It is that gift that will help us follow God every moment of every day, help us truly love every moment of every day if we are willing to listen and follow. The Holy Spirit is our GPS, telling us when we are making a wrong turn, warning us that we are heading in the wrong direct, directing us on the path we should take.

The worship team for this six week Eastertide series has decided to study what it means for us to listen to that inner GPS and become more Christ-like. How is it that what we would consider ordinary people, when they listen and follow God in their lives, can do extraordinary things? What I love about this series is that the people’s lives our worship team has chosen are members and friends of First Baptist Church.

We will start next week looking at how God took an ordinary Pennsylvania stubborn Dutchman to help provide an education for over 1,400 students every year in Liberia, West Africa. Gary and I will be here next week to tell our story.

Each week after that we are adding a part to our service called, “My Story” as different members of our congregation talk about how they live out their faith in their daily lives which we hoping will culminate in all of us doing extraordinary acts on Pentecost Sunday and then sharing our stories around the bonfire that evening in the park.

The worship team told Marcia and I how much you enjoyed hearing parts of people’s stories in the sermon I did a few weeks ago where I used your lives to illustrate one of the points the scripture lesson was teaching. We will not have time today to do that, but we are hoping in the future to make more opportunities for you to hear your faith journeys.

In this sermon series we will be looking at:

Extraordinary Earth,

Extraordinary Self,

Extraordinary God,

Extraordinary Care, and

Extraordinary Acts.

One of the extraordinary acts of love we do every week for each other is lift each other up in prayer. Before we celebrate Holy Communion as we remember Jesus’ ultimate extraordinary act of Love for us, let us take the time to listen to each other’s joys and concern and take them to our Loving God in prayer…(move to the pastoral prayer). Amen.