

*“How Will the Story End?”*

One Easter Sunday in another church, someone tried to present “the children’s message and had valiantly attempted to explain the resurrection to a group of very young children. . . . It went right over, or around, their heads.” Talking about the experience during a lively Bible Study group meeting, “Beth, long-retired after many years as a church educator, was a font of wisdom”. Telling what Beth shared, Kathryn Matthews said, “I’ll never forget how frustrated, almost incensed, she was by that sermon. I can still hear her New England-accented voice: ‘The one lesson we need to teach children at that age,’ she said emphatically, ‘is that God loves them. They don’t need to understand all the technicalities when they’re little; they just need to hear, in many different ways, that God loves them so much.’” (As told in the Sermon reflection on John 20:1-18 by Rev. Kathryn M. Matthews)

Beth, the retired Christian Educator, was correct in her assessment of what children need to hear about God’s love for them. Indeed, it is what all of us children need to hear! Unfortunately, like the rich young man, who asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit heaven, individuals and groups of Christians have, instead, often been more focused on obtaining eternal life or life after death. Yes, Jesus promised those, who believe in him, will be raised from death but, is that all there is to the point of the Easter Story? How will the story end?

The earlier Reading about the Resurrection suggests the point of the Easter Story. The angel, who was talking to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary at Jesus’ tomb, went on to issue their call, ***“Go quickly now, and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from death, and now he is going to Galilee ahead of you; there you will see him! Remember what I have told you.’ So they left the tomb in a hurry, afraid and yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.”***

It should not be much of a surprise to us but the male disciples, who, instead of going to Jesus’ tomb, were hiding for fear of losing their own lives. When these brave and bold women followers of the Risen Jesus followed the angel’s instructions, the original male disciples refused to believe them! The lives of those women had been changed because of the revelation of the Resurrection of Jesus the Christ. The unbelieving males had to actually experience the presence of the Risen Christ before their lives manifested the same type of radical transformation shown by the two Marys! The sharing of the Good News about the Crucified and Risen Jesus Christ would continue to be spread by transformed believers to many other people – many, whose lives would also be radically changed by the Gift of Faith.

The nature of the transformed lives of Christians is much more than merely having the promise of life after death! Jesus’ Death and Resurrection have clearly revealed God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love for us – just as Beth, the retired Christian Educator, had told that Bible Study Group. Going deeper, the magnitude of God’s Agape Love for us enables us to recognize and internalize that God has Forgiven us without our earning such Grace. Further, God wants us to live with our Divine Parent and one another, while living out the New Life in Christ – being the manifestation of God’s Agape Love for all people in everything that we say, think, or do! So, Jesus Christ the Risen Son of God continues to live – agape love through us when we acknowledge, internalize, and put the New Life in Christ – the way of agape love into practice. This means – like the two Marys at the tomb – we are filled with joy and are transformed into bringers of forgiveness, mercy, justice, peace, radical hospitality, and truth!

The Easter Story is not finished because each of us and millions around the world will decide its fate by our fruitful or fruitless response to God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Agape Love for us that was shown in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus the Christ! Will your response be joyful and fruitful like that of the two Marys? Amen.