

Sermon Notes – April 1, 2018
“The Power of Love”
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The instruments of death have many names – crucifixion, assassination, school shooting. Of course, wooden crosses and rifles are inert until someone chooses to employ them. In first century Israel it was the imperial power of Rome that chose to employ wooden crosses for the purpose of execution. The Roman Empire believed that publicly hanging someone on a wooden cross until they suffocated would ensure minimal resistance to the power they so desperately clung to. We are familiar with the power of might, the kind of power in which one person wants to exercise control over another, the kind of power that tantalizes the greedy and intimidates the weak. This power, this power of might, is fed by the even more insidious drive of greed. A now-infamous bumper sticker found on the back of European sports car offers a sardonic description greed: (show slide of statement) “He who dies with the most toys wins.”

In a way it is strange how vulnerable this power – this power of greed, of might, of death – how vulnerable it really is. Efforts by simple people, seemingly powerless people to love the marginalized, to lobby for basic education, to ensure safety appear to threaten this power. Representatives of the Roman Empire and the religious elite of Israel were so threatened by a homeless and itinerant preacher, whose message was simply to ‘love one’s neighbour’, that they organized a crucifixion. So threatened was an international terrorist organization, by one school girl’s voice, that the

Taliban organized an assassination. So frightened is America's most powerful lobby group, by the voice of high school students, that the NRA is committed to opposing, undermining and discrediting them.

We have seen the instruments of death at work. Those who gathered here on Good Friday recalled that dark day when the one we know as the Christ was nailed to a stake. If you recall the news reports you will know that Malala Yousafza, who had gained notoriety for speaking out against the Taliban's prohibition on girls attending school, was critically shot when boarding a bus near her home. You will know, from recent reports, that a disturbed young man easily armed himself with weapons of destruction and killed 17 students in Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland Florida. We are all too familiar with instruments of death, with the power of might, with the insidious drive of greed.

Yet what we are here to proclaim on this Easter morning is that the bumper sticker is wrong. We do not believe that the one with the 'most toys' wins. We believe that it is the one who embraces love and hope that ultimately wins and as Christians, we have an empty tomb to prove it. Despite their best efforts, despite their cruel devices, the Roman Empire and the religious elites could not contain the power of Love and Hope that was in Jesus. The power of Love and Hope burst the out of the tomb transforming timid women into pillars of strength, transforming cowering disciples into bastions of courage. Risking their very lives, they declared that Jesus was alive, that his preference for the marginalized was alive, that his pursuit of God over religion was alive, that the power of Love ultimately triumphs over the power of might. Two thousand years later we do not know the name of his jailor or the title of his executioner. Even the

name of Caesar has long since faded from human lips, while the name of Jesus is sung in churches around the world. This God, this God-power, this power of Love, Hope and Courage is still at work in the world.

Despite the Taliban's archaic declaration that women should not be educated Malala Yousafza at the age of eleven wrote a blog, she participated in a documentary, she contributed to newspaper and television reports, she raised her voice in the public sphere for the right of girls and women to an education. She survived the assassination attempt, she recovered in hospital in Pakistan and in England, and she garnered the support of people around the world for her cause. At 17 she became the youngest recipient of the Nobel Prize for Peace. These are the words she uses to describe her resurrection: (Show clip of Malala) "Weakness, fear and hopelessness died; strength, power and courage was born." Hallelujah, Christ is risen.

Despite the sound of rifle fire in the school hallways, despite the trauma of seeing classmates shot, despite the grief that followed, despite being publicly criticized by the NRA, students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas Highschool, and elsewhere, committed themselves to resurrection. They marched to the Florida state legislature and exacted some concessions from the law makers including raising the minimum age for buying rifles to 21 and banning bump stock firearms. Then last weekend they organized the "March for our Lives" with over 200,000 children on capitol hill along with supporters marching in 800 other locations. They spoke with the nervousness of youth, but they bravely stepped out of the tomb to speak truth to power. (show clip of Naomi Waldner) Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

During the “March for our live” I saw a sign with the following words: “If adults won’t lead the children, the children must lead the adults.” I recall a story of Jesus calling the children to his side. Placing one child in the centre he turned to his friends and said: “Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of God.” Today we are led into thoughts of resurrection by the children, called beyond the cross and through the empty tomb back into a conviction that Love will prevail. The powers of might are still at work in the world but as that old spiritual says “we shall overcome some day.” Praise and thanks be to the God who equips us with the great power of love in life, in death and in life beyond death. Amen!