

A Holy Reminder

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April 21, 2019 ■ Easter Sunday (9:30 a.m. Service)
(Year C) ■ John 20:1-8

Sometimes I'm a religious skeptic ... even as a pastor. Sometimes it's hard to remember exactly why you believe what you believe. It's often easy to become skeptical when part of your daily job is to think about God, and to speak about God. Sometimes my faith becomes so much of a habit that I kind of lose touch with those tangible aspects of belief. Sometimes doubt and confusion slip in. We live in such a violent and hate-filled world that it's hard to remember why you have faith at all. And so, at times, I admit that I need to be reminded

of what I believe ... of what I affirm ... and of what I value.

I suspect there was this same doubt and confusion as Mary Magdalene stood ... weeping ... outside of Jesus's tomb. Her hope for forgiveness and a new existence had been placed in this man ... and now his body was gone. *Was he who he claimed to be? Why, then, did he die as a criminal?* No easy answers and no body to be found inside that lonely tomb.

And then ... a voice ... a reminder. "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for? ... Mary!" A reminder of a faith and a hope that had *not* been misplaced. A faith and a hope that would sustain *even through death*.

And on this day, Easter, it is especially needed

that we *remember* ... that we remember why we proclaim this holy message, that Jesus died and is now risen again. That things like hope, and new life, and resurrection, *can* and *do* occur. We have seen them occur in the very human life of God. And we can see them occur in our own lives, as well.

So today I would like to tell you about something that happened to me earlier this month. It was a random moment ... that *reminded* me of what I believe ... a moment that reminded me of exactly *why* I believe in this Jesus, the one we know as the only Son of God. This moment came unexpectedly following a conference I attended with other pastors from Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. The conference was held in Angola, Indiana for a 2-day conference. And following this conference, most of us who lived in Ohio took I-80 to get home. The conference ended

around lunchtime, and the first food stop along I-80 was closeby. So I stopped to eat, and I expected to see some of my colleagues there, as well. After getting my food, I looked around and didn't see anyone I knew from the conference. Then I looked some more and saw one familiar face – Bishop Daniel Beaudoin. Daniel Beaudoin is the bishop of the Northwestern Ohio Synod, which includes all congregations from Mansfield to Gallion to Toledo. Daniel Beaudoin has a very demanding job, and I imagine that a quiet lunch alone is something that he doesn't get to enjoy often. While I didn't want to bother him, I also felt inclined to say hello and tell him what a nice conference we had just had. And, as expected, he invited me to sit down and eat with him.

And that random lunch with Bishop Daniel Beaudoin is what I would like to speak with you about today.

And not just this random lunch with a random man, but specifically what he displayed to me that day. Daniel Beaudoin is what I believe a pastor truly ought to be. He is humble, compassionate, kind, caring, forgiving, and always willing to take the time and listen. He is what I hope to become as a pastor. And, in talking with Daniel Beaudoin, I was reminded of why I believe in Jesus.

Have you ever met someone that really *exuded* the spirit of Jesus? Daniel Beaudoin, bishop of Northwestern Ohio, did that for me, on this random April Tuesday, over lunch, at a rest stop along I-80. Daniel Beaudoin just had a simple conversation with me ... nothing significant ... but it was his spirit, it was the way that he embodied Jesus ... that reflected all of those things that I know to be true about Jesus. He exuded this so strongly, and so beautifully, that I couldn't help but be drawn to

it. And it became a needed *moment* in my life of faith. It became a *reminder* of why I have placed my faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

We live in a world where it is more and more difficult to believe in a divine power, to believe in this mysterious faith that we proclaim today. The things we see in the news, and in our communities, put our faith to the test. When we see addiction, suicide, illness, anxiety, depression ... when we see these things in our families, and even in our own lives, it's all but impossible to believe that this faith we proclaim is something more than empty words. It is extremely difficult to cling to hope.

And that's why we need reminders. That's why we need to see and hear Jesus, in a real and tangible way.

For me, I saw in Daniel Beaudoin all the qualities of Jesus that continually draw me back to faith ... and not only did I see those qualities – *and this is the catch* – I wanted to *emulate* them. I wanted, again, to be a follower of those qualities of Jesus.

And so, in an unexpected way, I saw Jesus that day. I saw something deep and profound. I saw those qualities of Jesus that can break into the most dark times of doubt, and can give us hope and new life.

Today we affirm these qualities of unconditional love and unconditional forgiveness. And yet still ... we need to be reminded of *why* we believe it ... so that we don't lose hope ... and so that we might share it with others whose faith has been lost. If this man, Bishop Daniel Beaudoin, showed me Jesus that day, then maybe I can do the same for

somebody else. And maybe you can, too. Maybe we all need a little bit of help with faith. **And maybe ... maybe Jesus shows up at those unexpected times and in those unexpected places, to remind us of who he is, and of a love that's unlike anything we've ever known, and a hope that will always be with us.**

AMEN.

