

## **LSBC Easter Sunday Sermon**

April 12, 2020

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Text: Matthew 28:1-10

Today we celebrate Jesus' resurrection! We celebrate the one who rolled away the stone from the tomb, who left his grave clothes behind, the one who made a way where there seemed to be no way at all. Today we celebrate Easter! Resurrection Sunday!

I heard a pastor this week remind me of something important. She said that when people are struggling with hope, they don't want or need a definition of hope. They need to hear stories of hope. This is the most powerful story of hope I know:

Many of you know that Cindy and I, our family, a faculty colleague, and around twenty of our Ouachita Baptist University students were in a plane crash in 1999. But this story isn't about us. It's about my student assistant, Kristen Maddox Cheng.

Kristen was a delightful college student. She worked for me for four years. Almost always a smile on her face, a talented and diligent student. She was multiple winner of university-level singing competitions, she had the voice of an angel. She had a steady boyfriend equally as bright and talented in his own way.

Then came the plane crash.

Kristen had third degree burns on her hands and her voice was badly burned. She went through skin grafts and months of voice therapy as well as mental health therapy. The smile left her face. The future she had planned was now gone. She could speak but could only sing a few notes. She didn't even know if her boyfriend would still be interested in her now that she was physically and emotionally damaged.

She was told that she would struggle to care for children should she ever become a mom. She was told that she would have four to five lung infections every year because of the damage to her lungs. She was told she would never have enough strength in her voice to ever be a teacher, much less a singer. She was told that her ability to use her hands would always be limited because they were covered with skin grafts.

There were multiple incredibly dark clouds circling around this wonderful young woman. Clouds that had changed the course of her life forever.

But Kristen had something going for her. Something only visible if you knew where and how to look. Something powerful beyond words. She had a faith in Christ that, while shaken, retained its deep and tenacious roots. Through the literal storm that brought down our plane and the figurative one that shook her to her core, those roots held firm.

It turns out that Kristen's boyfriend, James, did indeed still want to be with her and they married a year after the crash. They went to Arizona, where James would start

graduate school and Kristen would take time to heal. The dry Arizona air would be good for her lungs and the time in a new place would provide rest for her soul.

Then a couple of truly remarkable things happened.

Kristen signed up to be a volunteer for the Maricopa County Burn Unit. A barely imaginable decision. She determined that she would use her experience to try to help families whose loved ones were in the burn unit. For a time, she would visit with families in the unit and try to explain to them what their loved one was going through.

After a time, though, she discovered that the experience was too fresh for these families. They weren't yet at an emotional place where her story was really helpful to them. So, she decided to see if she could help out inside the unit itself. She became a volunteer inside the unit, helping the burn nurses with the everyday tasks of helping the patients.

One day a young burn patient said something to her that changed her life. She was helping change the young man's burn dressings. Changing dressings is the most gruesome part of a burn patient's experience. It's incredibly painful and difficult in the best of circumstances. This young man said to her, "None of the *other nurses* does this as well as *you* do." He didn't know that Kristen wasn't a nurse. Far from it. She had undergraduate degrees in music. She had no other training or experience in healthcare beyond the limited time she had spent helping there in Arizona.

His statement changed her life. In his words she heard God's call. That day she heard God make a way where there had seemed to be no way. It was a day when the light of hope returned and kicked down the doors of darkness.

Kristen signed up for nursing school. As James was later finishing his doctorate, Kristen was finishing her nurse's training. Kristin is now a nurse, a mom with three kids, and still a bright and shining example of how hope literally does spring eternal.

You may not be very hopeful right now. That's ok. I heard a quote the other day attributed to a South African person during the days of battling apartheid. He said, "I'm not optimistic, but I am hopeful." Let's not subscribe to a hope that is nothing more than denial. It was still dark on Good Friday and it may be dark for you right now.

But know this, the God we worship is always reaching out to God's creation. The entire arc of Scripture – from Genesis to Revelation – is an arc of hope. God continues to reach out to bring life. God is relentlessly redeeming creation. The resurrection of Jesus is simply the conclusive act of God's many works of redemption.

The resurrection is the ultimate example of hope – where God made a way where there seemed to be no way at all.

Today we celebrate the Jesus who made a way where there was no way, who opened closed doors, tore down walls, opened a tomb. We celebrate the Jesus who shows us the way to hope when there seems to be no possibility of hope.

At the end of today's text, Jesus sends a message to his disciples. He sends it through two women, by the way, the women who were the first evangelists. He says, "go to Galilee and I'll meet you there." He says, keep moving, stay on the journey, and I'll meet you on the other side.

The message is the same to us today. Jesus is *alive* and he's present and he's right around the corner waiting for us to show up.

Thanks be to God!

Amen.