

Easter Sunday April 9, 2023

O God, who for our redemption gave your only-begotten Son to the death of the cross, and by his glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of our enemy: Grant us so to die daily to sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*

Theme: Without death, there can be no resurrection;
Unless we fully die to our old ways, we will not find new life.

I. Easter – Good news and holy terror

- A. Very hard to for me to preach – hard to believe this miracle
- B. It is like looking directly at the sun – the brilliance will blind you – I cannot explain it.
- C. Judaism – the faithful will not even write on paper the name of God, based on Judaic understanding of the 3rd Commandment.

“Thou shalt not take the name of the lord thy God in vain”

Respect, awe, reverence. To use human words to describe God is to put limits on Him. Our words are limited to our experience on this terrain of physical existence. Knowing the limitation of language to capture even a glimpse of our Higher Power, I often pray now, not only in Jesus’ name, but also end a prayer with “the many names of God” Prime Mover, Higher Power, Creator, The God of the power of life.

II. There can be no resurrection without death

On that early Easter morning, John says in his 20th chapter, that early in the morning while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene and some of the other women went to the tomb. They went to the tomb after the

crucifixion and burial of Jesus. They went to the tomb of their world that was falling apart. They went to the tomb to bury and to grieve. All their hopes and dreams of the future were collapsed. They were undone.

In so many ways I have that same feeling today.

Undone is so many ways.

So much death all around. So much rivalry, prejudice, fear. Things we had depended upon, trusted, our hopes for the future. Peace on Earth, good will toward men, sometimes seem like such a distant dream.

But Mary and the women got up and went.

They faced their grief and went. They went to perform the rites of burial even as their hope for the future died. They went, following the liturgies of their religion and their tradition. And when they went, they discovered that, even in the darkness, MUCH TO THEIR SURPRISE, they saw SOMETHING THEY COULD NOT IMAGINE: DEATH HAD BEEN REVERSED.

III. This Easter: I remember NEW LIFE

Twelve years ago, in need of a liver transplant, I experienced the pattern of life, death and resurrection to new life. I had lived the life of white privilege fully, albeit foolishly, dangerously and without understanding. After 56 years of bullet proof existence, Hepatitis C knocked unexpectedly on my weeping doorsill.

My daughter, a high school senior, soon became the youngest living doner in the USA. She gave her Dad 60% of her liver. Why, when asked? "He is my Dad and I love him". Nurses above me, tubes around me, restrained to bed, an image of Christ on the cross helped me endure the physical pain.

There was inner spiritual pain as well. Because of foolish choices, adolescent peer pressure and family dysfunction I had walked a path my parents hoped I would never travel.

In those hospital days after surgery, and in the years that have followed, certain truths have come into focus. Truths that in some ways, touch all of us. Me, clergy man, servant of God and the church, was brought to my knees. Perhaps you understand. I slowly began to give up the throne of my kingdom, realizing my inadequacies, my helplessness and the great sacrifices my daughter, my family, and so many nameless faces had worked so hard that I might live.

Years of marriage, family, even a life of service, dedicated as a priest in various churches. Through the years, I woke up to the fact my interaction with those who love me all pointed out that I was a man in need of some sort of seeing the need for healing, which finally brings about inner repentance and salvation. Without death, there will be no resurrection. The hard fact is, that, only by being humbled, by looking death in the eye and lying in the bed next to us, are we willing to slowly approach the door which opens to new life.

Why is it that we have to come that close to hurt before we change? Not one of us only lives only in the moment of now. We have a whole freight train of life behind us that pushes us. Resentments that we hang on to. A freight train of hurt that we have to learn to slow down, stop and finding healing and new life. Whether you believe that miraculous light entered that dark tomb or not, surely all of us recognize the darkness in the world about us, and that we need a lighthouse to bring us home.

Is it possible that we can stop that freight train, find a different track and destination that comes from a heart born again?

This Easter, our planet and the citizens of the world are in crisis, near death in so many ways. Some are already dead and gone, but not forgotten. We need redemption from the grave. We need a Savior, help beyond our limited selves. In just a few minutes, at the height of the Holy Eucharist, we will proclaim the mystery of our faith, "Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again". In Greek, the original language of the New Testament, the proper noun "Christ" means the "anointed one, the "chosen one", a person with a special God-ordained purpose.

In my younger years, with youthful innocence and joy, I believed that Jesus would literally return to earth, as the scriptures tell, and all our problems would be over. I am afraid we cannot wait that long. I believe that you and me, are to embody the risen and returning Christ. Jesus said, it is good that I go away, but I will not leave you comfortless, I will send the Spirit, who will remind you of all things.

And this one thing we MUST remember: Just as Jesus died, so must we.

As a child I was taught that Jesus died to save us from our sins. As an adult, I am thinking that Jesus died because of our sins. Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again. I have hope that the power of the Spirit of creation will convert us all. I thank God that I was that close to death and have been given new life.

LOVE HAS CHANGED ME.

I have been UNDERSTOOD, FORGIVEN AND loved by my family, and it is up to me to let that Spirit of Jesus, that spirit of love, to rise daily in my heart of hearts. In the face of pain only Love can humble us, and allow us to be born again, just as Jesus said.

We are born of water as we enter this physical world; we are born of the Spirit to enter the world of grace. Let us pray that all of human kind will live with grateful hearts, that all will live expectant hopeful lives.

Let us pray that the power of the Spirit opens our hearts to love all of creation and one another. Let us remember that man from long ago who died, yet by the power of the Holy Spirit, rises to yet live in our hearts and minds today.

Alleluia, Christ is risen. He is risen indeed, Alleluia. Amen.

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