

Luke 24:1-12  
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"Easter"

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A Sunday school teacher was asking her six-year-old class about the meaning of Easter. "Children," she said, "Do you know why we celebrate Easter?" A little girl raised her hand.

"Yes Jenny," said the teacher. Jenny said, "Is Easter when we put on costumes and go trick-or-treating?" "No, Jenny. That's Halloween."

A little boy yelled, "It's when we set off fireworks!" "No Jimmy, that's Independence Day. Anybody else?"

A shy little girl in the back said, "Easter is when Jesus died." The teacher replied with anticipation, "And what happened after that?"

"Well, he died and was buried in a tomb, and every Easter he comes out..." The teacher got more excited as the shy girl added... "if he sees his shadow there's 6 more weeks of winter."

During my childhood I mostly understood Easter as something that happened to Jesus a long time ago, and as something that was primarily about a promise of being with God after we die.

And it IS true... Easter is just such a promise. Following our physical death, in some way, in some fashion the resurrection gives us assurance that our life becomes a part of God. We have this confidence, this assurance from Chapter 21 of the book of Revelation, "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; for the first things will have passed away."

But for this young teenager, death was not a very powerful reality. You know how easy it is teenagers to assume they are invincible, and I was no different. In addition I didn't experience the death of any close relatives during my teen years. In fact, we didn't even have any beloved pets die in my childhood. As a teenager Easter simply meant going to church, and then hunting for my Easter Basket, and sharing a family meal -- it was a fun day but it didn't speak to me personally.

Then one year someone pointed out that Jesus isn't the only one in Scripture who is raised from the dead. Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead. And Ezekiel describes the old dry, dead bones of the people of Israel coming together bone to bone. He tells how sinews and flesh covered the bones, and finally the four winds blew and the whole company of dry bones stood to their feet.

Once I got to seminary I took another look at the Easter stories in the bible. All of them talk about the women, or whoever finds the empty tomb first,... they don't just go away satisfied they will be with Jesus when they die. They frantically, excitedly, fearfully dash full speed to go

and tell the others “He is Risen.” He is alive! The women understand that Jesus’ resurrection means something in this life. It was the power to overcome, to rise above, to speak truth to power, to find comfort, to make it through one more day—it was the power to trust that the sorrow, fear, and hatred we experience, the little deaths are not the end. These are not the full story.

Easter became real to me when I realized it was an experience of here and now. Rev. Kate Huey puts it this way, “The sin of the world cut Jesus down; but God raised him up anyway! Hatred, fear, and violence thundered on Friday, but God had the last word anyway, loving the world too much to give up on this new creation.

Easter matters because this “anyway” happens every day, right here and right now. We fall short of the glory of God, God loves us anyway. We face loss, God offers healing and wholeness anyway. We experience death, and our little deaths, and God is always raising up new life from the ashes, anyway. From the ashes of Brussels God will raise new life, from the ashes of political attacks God can raise new life, from the ashes of oppression in Cuba God can raise new life. If Pope Francis can break with over 2 thousands years of Catholic Church tradition and wash the feet of migrants of many different faiths, we need never fear that God is doing a new thing.

As the scene concluded on Palm Sunday, we saw Jesus seated atop a humble colt riding into Jerusalem during the tense and hectic time of Passover. Chaos, violence, resentment, celebration were all there. The scene ends with some Pharisees telling Jesus, in spite of all the other voices, all the other noise, his disciples should quiet down. Jesus replies, “If my disciples do quiet down, the good news I bring is so everlasting, so indestructible, these stones by the side of the road will shout out.” We might add, “Anyway!”

We ended last Sunday with the plea, “would someone please let the stones speak?”

Well... the Stones have spoken. In the most powerful, dramatic, decisive, mysterious, miraculous way... The stones have rolled back, sprung open and unleashed God’s power and love into the world... the stones have spoken. When it looked like the end, “He is risen! When it looked like death, “He is alive!”

In every age the powers of death and sin try to rule, they try to win, they try to defeat truth, and wisdom, and righteousness. But Easter means God’s love continues to grow anyway.

Happy Easter. Alleluia. And Amen