

Easter Sermon 2017

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“Morning Light”

Matthew 28:1-10 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

This sermon woke me from my slumber at three in the morning last Tuesday. I am often awake at that time as our fifteen-year-old cat Diesel likes to begin his outdoor rounds early and demands to be let out at precisely that hour each day. Normally, I scarcely bother waking up to let him out. I simply open the door, swing past the bathroom, and roll back into bed.

This day was different- it wasn't the cat that woke me, it was something else, something I couldn't quite put my finger on.

Marcina Wiedeher, the Benedictine nun whose work “Seven Sacred Pauses,” has become central to my devotional life, reminds us that each hour of the day is sacred. The hour between three and four am is what she calls “the awakening hour.” This hour is the hour that greets the predawn light, its themes are praise, resurrection, joy and delight for the coming light of a new day. Poets and Philosophers throughout time have known this hour as a thin place between the rational mind and the dream state.

I think it **was** resurrection that woke me up, and once it had hold of me it would not let me drift back to sleep.

The breezes at dawn have secrets to tell; don't go back to sleep. Rumi

So, if you would, I'd like to invite you to picture that timeframe in your mind's eye. It is cool and gently dark, it is quiet, and full of mystery...

It is in the mystery of the predawn hour that Mary Magdalene and the other women make their journey to pay homage to the body of their beloved Jesus... Pause

They arrive at the tomb and suddenly there is an earthquake, scripture says, a GREAT earthquake. What happens in an earthquake? Things get shaken up right- we get shaken up- shaken right out of our senses.

So, it's the middle of the night and there has just been an earthquake and the man whom these women loved more than any other has been crucified, declared dead and entombed.

The women must have felt like they were floating, a disoriented, untethered.

You and I know that space, we have been there too.

In the early hours and days after just after someone we love, someone close to us has died.

The reality is just beginning to sink in that the person who was once within our grasp is no longer there. We know this liminal time, this deep, mysterious time.

Things happen during that time that are hard to explain, experiences, conversations, epiphanies happen, and sometimes we experience, if just for a moment, a very real connection with the person who has died.

No one else may be around to see it, but those moments are real- we know they are.

Holocaust survivor and philosopher Victor Frankel once wrote that,

“The meaning of life, is to give life meaning.”

It is in our nature to ascribe meaning to our experiences: the flash of light, that rainbow in a clear sky, that bird, or book, that stranger and what they said; it must mean that the person I lost is okay, they are still somehow with me and want me to carry on...

Most often those moments, though they might be startling at the time, bring us comfort; fill us with a sense of connection to the person we have loved so deeply and lost.

That is where we enter the Easter story this morning. Resurrection is a tender and deeply personal experience. In a perfect world, we might dwell in this moment for a few days, just to think about what we had learned in our own lives from experiences like these.

The breezes at dawn have secrets to tell; don't go back to sleep.

We don't give ourselves much time to catch up to it all before the halleluiahs and Easter brunch.

But we can always circle back, remember Easter isn't a day- but a season that **starts** today. The Easter season begins with a period of disorientation, for certainly, not all the disciples experienced the risen Christ at the same time, it happened in layers. Just as our own knowing unfolds in layers.

And Ok, in case you're worried, I do know about the elephant in the room. The fact that some folks aren't convinced the resurrection ever happened. You can relax, that tension is always present in progressive communities of faith on Easter morning.

Come on we are educated people. We know that Christianity isn't the first spiritual tradition to have employed a resurrection story, the most familiar are found among the Greeks and sacred rituals of the Near East. They are often called transformation stories.

The main difference is that this experience or sighting of the risen Christ is not as much a story about the transformation of Jesus, as it is a story about the transformation of his followers. The disciples experiencing the risen Christ also experienced a mandate.

Don't go back to sleep!

If What Jesus did on Palm Sunday was a political act, the Resurrection is doubly so. For Jesus' message to the disciples was that if we could find a way to empty ourselves out to one another in love- we will have moved beyond the constraints of life and death because you can't kill love.

Death cannot kill love, my friends, that's the Good News of Easter.

Love lives on, generation after complicated generation, love lives on!
Alleluia.

Biblical scholar Marcus Borg, used to say of the Gospel stories, "I don't know if they happened exactly this way but, I know they're true."

The details of the resurrection, historical or otherwise are unresolvable, all we have are stories to go on and frankly I don't spend a lot of time wondering if they are true or not.

The question is how do they motivate us to be Christ's disciples?

How does the idea of resurrection inspire our living?

I'll tell ya how it works for me. When I am in the cave of death, and I mean the cave; with stomach flu, or depression, or anger, or upset, I try to remember that a new day will dawn, that darkness does not last forever, that resurrection is real.

But isn't instantaneous- resurrection is constant.

If we take Jesus' life to heart, we know that no one- no one is beyond resurrection. But resurrection doesn't come on our schedule, it is unpredictable, and usually shows up the our darkest hour.

The breezes at night have secrets to tell us, Don't go back to sleep.

Easter Exultet

Shake out your qualms. Shake up your dreams. Deepen your roots. Extend your branches.

Trust deep water and head for the open, even if your vision shipwrecks you.

Quit your addiction to sneer and complain. Open a lookout. Dance on a brink. Run with your wildfire.

You are closer to glory leaping an abyss than upholstering a rut.

Not dawdling. Not doubting. Intrepid all the way walk toward clarity.

At every crossroad be prepared to bump into wonder. Only love prevails.

En route to disaster insist on canticles.

Lift your ineffable out of the mundane.

Nothing perishes; nothing survives; everything transforms!

Honeymoon with Big Joy!

~ James Broughton ~(*Sermons of the Big Joy*)