

I Have Seen the Lord (John 20:18)

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...too often, MY reality is that while it may be Easter, it's still "a Good Friday world."

The last time some of us were in the sanctuary was Good Friday. The room was darkened to match the somber mood. The time before that was Palm Sunday. Then we shrouded the cross. Today dark turns to light and we celebrate with lilies shaped like trumpets as if to joyfully say, "He is alive! He is alive!" I don't know about you, but I have trouble adjusting from one extreme feeling to the other.

Did you hear about the singing group called "The Resurrection" that was scheduled to sing at a local church? When a big snowstorm postponed the performance, the pastor fixed the outside sign to read, "Resurrection postponed."

How do you feel this Easter Sunday morning? Did your mood match the occasion when you woke up? Or did you feel like postponing all the Easter hooplah? Are you wondering how some folk can get so excited? Are you happy for them, but just not quite "there" yourself?

Actually, our preoccupation with plastic eggs has sort of affected my mind! Don't you think we overdo the "egg" thing? The big fuss we make about those things at Easter time seems quite misguided. Nonetheless, I partake. Olivia and I had a good time last Sunday afternoon filling and hiding over 100 plastic eggs for the youth group. But that fair amount of pleasantries didn't compare to the wild mania I observed an hour later, especially as I watched 40 legs and arms scramble past me down in the fellowship hall,

faster than I could keep track of them all! I thought, “Truly, the world has turned upside down!” for I there were enthusiastic shouts and squeals of delight from kids I thought might be too old for an Easter egg hunt. How could 12-16 year olds get so excited about a bunch of plastic eggs? I was happy for them, even though I really wasn’t quite “there” myself!

Oh Easter egg, oh Easter egg, of all the eggs most lovely!

Oh Easter egg, oh Easter egg, of all the eggs most lovely!

When you are hidden in the night

I’ll hunt and find you in morning light

Oh Easter egg, oh Easter egg, of all the eggs most lovely!

Sometimes I feel like the grinch that stole Easter. I laugh a little too loudly at the joke about postponing the resurrection.

For too often, MY reality is that while it may be Easter, it’s still “a Good Friday world.”

What’s your “reality?”

That (GOOD FRIDAY) was truly the disciples’ reality on Easter morning. They were so steeped in their shock and grief they couldn’t even open their eyes that morning. There was no reason to. You think I’m an Easter grinch? You think you’re not quite “there?” Think about them and what they’d been through.

Somebody once said that when you really know suffering you see the little details. I don’t know if that’s true, but maybe that’s why there are so many details recorded in this story:

- the other disciple outran Peter and got to the tomb first but didn’t go in once he saw the empty linen wrappings,
- Peter did go in, and noticed that the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head was rolled up in a place by itself,

- THEN the other disciple went in,
- THEN they both went home,
- while Mary was left standing there, crying.

Another has said that the rules of daily living seem to change when something traumatic happens to you. I recently read about a woman who had lived her life never riding an elevator alone because she was afraid it would get stuck and she'd be all alone and no one would find her. But then her husband was in a terrible car accident and almost died. When she had to ride an empty elevator to get to his hospital room on the eighth floor the old rule didn't seem to matter anymore. She got right in that empty elevator, thinking, "Let it get stuck. Who cares? I've already lived through much worse."

I guess the rules changed for Mary several times that weekend.

- First Jesus is cruelly crucified.
- Then his body goes missing.
- Then the gardener is not the gardener at all, but Rabbouni, Jesus.

If you think YOUR rules ever got changed, think about Mary's life that weekend!

That's why someone once wrote, "What the Gospels ask is not 'Do you believe?' but 'Have you encountered a risen Christ?'"

It's important to believe. It was noteworthy that the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, saw and believed once he stepped inside the empty tomb.

But the bigger story came after that, seen in Mary's words, "I have seen the Lord."

New life is born out of the pains of the old. (H.Nouwen)

Remember this: Easter is not just a holy event that happened almost 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem. It is when we discover that all the Good Fridays of our lives cannot destroy the love God has for us. (Rev. Nathan Baxter)

"What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the creator calls a butterfly."

Barbara Brown Taylor, probably my favorite preacher, tells: When she was a girl, she spent a lot of time in the woods, which were full of treasures for her. At night she lined them up on my bed: flakes of mica, buckeyes bigger than shooter marbles, blue jay feathers, bird bones and – if she was lucky – a cicada shell, one of those dry brown bug bodies you can find on tree trunks when the 17-year locusts come out of the ground. She liked them for at least two reasons. First, because they were horrible looking, with their huge empty eye sockets and their six sharp little claws. By hanging them on her sweater or – better yet – in her hair, she could usually get the prettier, more popular girls at school to run screaming away from her, which she said somehow evened the score. She also liked them because they were evidence that a miracle had occurred. They looked dead, but they weren't. They were just shells. Every one of them had a neat slit down its back, where the living creature inside of it had escaped, pulling new legs, new eyes, new wings out of that dry brown body and taking flight. At night she heard them singing their high song in the trees. If you had asked them, she speculated, none of them could have told you where they left their old clothes. That is all the disciples saw when they got to the tomb on that first morning: two piles of old clothes. The tomb was just the cicada shell with the neat slit down its back. Jesus had outgrown his shell!

Here's another story I recently read about:

A little college chapel in Holland, Michigan has 12 large floor-to-ceiling window panels, with two stained glass saints captured in each window, 24 people in all. Each morning as the light breaks in the east, these stained saints begin to glow with the rising sun. Each window bears witness to something significant: each is a witness to the radical love of God.

On one particular morning the young college chaplain sat under the window of Mary holding the Christ child in her arms. She looked peaceful, he thought. He found find the image of her with a child comforting as he sat heavy, his head hanging. He didn't have the words to pray, but instead sighed a sound more like a groan. His faith felt out of joint, he later wrote in his journal.

Before he had left home early that morning, his wife Kristen had told him the news. The test was negative. Again.

It had been three years. Doctors. Medications. Clinics. Articles. Procedures. Prayers. Negative. Again. They were slowly coming to grips with the reality that they might not be able to have their own children. This wasn't how he had pictured life. He had grown up with images of a family, and on that particular morning he had felt like he was mourning the loss of someone he loved but had never met.

In the grand scheme of the cosmos, he knew this was not a huge tragedy. Others are going through worse things. As the writer of Hebrews might say, it's not as if he'd resisted to the point of shedding blood. There were bigger and more important things for God to be caring about. But for his wife Kristen and himself, he thought, in their small life, it was a big struggle.

He was alone in his questions that morning. In a few hours the college community would gather in that chapel, as they do every week, to worship the risen Son. In a few hours, Abby would be sitting under Jeremiah's window, lamenting her mom who just died from leukemia. Kate, who was struggling through her parents' divorce, would sit where she always does under the window of Andrew. Doc, whose father had just passed away, would be sitting under Ezekiel. Zack, who at that time had more doubts than answers, would sit under the shadow of Thomas. Soon everyone would bring all their discouragement, frustration and hurt into the belly of that chapel.

Yes, it's Easter, and we are here, celebrating the Risen Lord. But this morning there is also a melting pot of discouragement, frustration, and hurt in the belly of "our" chapel here at Luther Rice. Some of you are concerned about loved ones, some are grieving over

loss, some are just stressed beyond measure. You, too, are living in a “Good Friday world.”

So as Mary stood there alone, weeping, you come to the garden alone. While the dew is still on the rosebuds, walk with your risen Savior, talk to him, and hear him tell you that you belong to him. Feel the joy as you linger with Him. That is your invitation as you prepare to take part in the Lord’s Supper...