

Easter Day
March 27, 2016
Year C

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Acts 10:34-43
1 Corinthians 15:19-26
Luke 24:1-12

Why do you seek the living among the dead? In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Why do you seek the living among the dead? The answer is, of course, that the women were not seeking the living. They were looking for a corpse. They had come to do the necessary things to bury a dead body. After all their hopes had been shattered by the events of two days earlier, after they had seen Jesus die, they put their hope in some back corner of their souls and went on with necessities. From the women's perspective, and ours, this makes sense. Jesus died, therefore we look for him among the dead.

The angels' perspective is quite different. They are inhabitants of eternal glory. This human the women are looking for is the Lord of Life who created all things. Mortals have done their worst, and he died. But it could not be that death would hold him who is life itself. What a silly notion!

On Easter, we Christians celebrate a fact that has many repercussions. We celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We do not celebrate the resuscitation of an apparently dead person. This is not near death experience or an out of body experience. This is not medical phenomenon. Nor are we talking about a spiritual continuation of life after a physical death. There is no ghost here. We are talking about new life. Jesus was really dead. Dead as doornail. He was put into this tomb. Now there is no body, the tomb is open. Jesus refused to stay decently dead. Jesus is on the loose.

We Christians believe that when we are baptized we participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus. That means that death does not win. Death is defeated. Life wins. Even though we will die as Jesus did, we will also rise from the dead as Jesus did. Death is no longer to be feared. The author of Hebrews says of Jesus that he partook of our human nature "that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage." (Heb. 2:14b-15) If we no longer need to fear death, then we can be liberated. For all slavery, all coercion, all bondage is based on fear. The oppressor says if you don't do what I say, you will be killed. We Christians can now say, "Oh Yeah? Just try it."

All of our other fears are really forms of the fear of death. Fear of any loss is a fear of diminishment, either a diminishment of my self or of my capacities. The loss of health is a diminishment of my self and feels like a step toward death. The loss of employment is a diminishment of my capacity to feed myself and my family and feels like a threat to survival. Even fear of embarrassment is a fear that I will be perceived as less, that I will be less, that in some way I will be annihilated. All such fears are defeated by the resurrection. We are alive now; we will live even if we die.

This life we are given in the resurrection is not part of nature. We are not talking about a kind of metaphysical turn of the seasons. While our experience on this planet of plants coming back to life after an apparent death in the winter months provides us with a metaphor for the resurrection, they are not the same. The life of resurrection is supernatural, it is of a different kind. The Risen Jesus changes his appearance, sometimes recognized, sometimes not. He can pass through locked doors. Nevertheless, his is not a ghost but has a body. He eats a fish to prove it and asks Thomas to touch his wounded flesh. This is not what we would call normal

human existence. It is our destiny and hope.

Furthermore, resurrection is a gift and act of God. Acts says God raised Jesus. This begs the later question of whether Jesus is God. In any case, the dead human Jesus was raised by divine power and action. It does not happen by itself. God holds our lives in his hands both now and after we die.

Life wins. This is the message of Easter. More importantly, God wins. And because God has chosen to cast in his lot with human flesh, we win. Because it is Jesus who is raised from the dead, what Jesus stood for and died for wins. That means that love, justice, mercy, compassion, joy, freedom, courage, all win. It means that the worst thing is never the last thing. After bondage comes freedom, after sin comes forgiveness, after estrangement comes reconciliation, after sickness comes healing, after death comes life. Evolution wins over entropy. The last thing God has to say in the Bible is, “The old has passed away. Behold, I make all things new.”

Yes there is a cross. Yes, we Christians are called to walk the way of the cross. We walk the way of the cross because it is the way to victory. Today we celebrate life. Today, every day, every minute we are part of the new creation God is making right now. So we greet each other and we greet the world with the ancient shout:

Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.