Holy Easter April 16, 2017

All Saints’ Church Year A

Acts 10:34-43 Colossians 3:1-4

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 John 20:1-18

Alleluia. Christ is Risen. The Lord is Risen, indeed. Alleluia.

I believe in the Easter story. I really do. Fully.

I believe that Jesus was dead, dead, dead. And then was buried, buried, buried. Anointed and wrapped in linen cloths and placed deep into the ground, deep, beyond any reach, with a heavy stone rolled into the tomb’s entrance, sealing it forever. The body of Jesus gone forever.

And then the Source of all Life, who carves out mountains, who creates the color orange and the cry of a hawk, and who shapes the trunk of an elephant and the neck of a giraffe, shows up, and strikes like lightening, breaking all barriers apart, to raise Jesus from the dead as a way to write an incredible love letter to the world:

Violent and vicious blows will never have true power. Love is stronger than death. You matter. Life rejoices in hope.

I believe in the Easter story, and not just as a “metaphor.” I believe Jesus was raised from the dead. I believe it really happened.

I believe it in the same way I believe in gravity.

Gravity tugs on matter to form galaxies, stars and black holes. Yet despite this expansive reach, gravity is the wimpiest of all forces. It’s the Sun’s gravity that keeps the Earth in its orbit and the moon’s gravity that’s responsible for the ocean tides on Earth, and yet we are not aware of the pull of gravity on our bodies. It keeps our feet firmly rooted on the planet Earth, and yet, if mobile, we can lift a toothbrush to our mouth without a thought. Such power, yet so faint. It’s kind of miraculous and very mysterious.

When you ask physicists, “What is gravity?” their answer is, “We don’t know. We know how it operates; we study its effects, how it behaves. We speak about ‘gravitons that emanate gravitational fields,’ yet we can’t find empirical evidence of these things. We have to trust that they are there. That’s the only way the math works, but then, even then, the math doesn’t always work.”

It sounds like a metaphor to me. Oh but wait, gravity is real. We believe it exists.

Maybe we’ve been going about this all wrong. I don’t know how the resurrection happened. The details are a bit unclear. The math doesn’t always work. Post Resurrection Jesus is so real that Thomas can stick his finger into his wounds, and yet Jesus seems to be able to pass through walls. Mary doesn’t recognize him even though they are right next to each other, talking, but then he calls her by name and she sees him. He has the power to ascend, yet asks not to be held down. Such power, yet so faint.

Maybe we should take a page from our physicists’ gravity book. They seem to get away with quite a bit of not knowing. It doesn’t seem to bother them. You see, we too can’t answer lots of questions, but we do know how the resurrection operates; we can study its effects, how it behaves.

You’ve all been there with me. You’re down, afraid or overwhelmed, maybe even ashamed and a smile or a kind word gives you courage. You know that your closest friends are the ones that you can be vulnerable with, because somehow by sharing your weaknesses you bond. Or when you speak and let the worse be known, the speaking releases you. What about those times when you spontaneously begin to cry as a child who’s been abused reaches for your hand? What about those times when you don’t deserve to be forgiven, but your beloved forgives anyway? And then, of course, there are those times when you’re knee deep in cold spring dirt and there are those tiny impossible shoots of green.

Jesus came into the world to show us a new way of living. Strong and faint all at the same time. It has a lot to do with dying, letting go, and releasing. You have to lose yourself before you will gain yourself. Turn away from your egotistical way of defending life and liberty at all costs and trust that by falling you will rise, by loving you will gain, by giving you will receive. The first shall be last. The poor will be blessed. Be willing to live passionately, to risk, no matter the cost. Don’t stop loving even though it hurts. See with a third eye trusting where God seems most absent, God is nearest.

And then here’s the crux of it. When we live in this dying which is really living, we are choosing to practice Resurrection. To live a Jesus-kind-of-hope. A Jesus hope is not about optimism. A Jesus hope is the certainty that things finally have a victorious meaning no matter how they turn out.

When we can do that, we can look at our lives and see backward and forward that our breaking can become our making, that abundance has nothing to do with gaining and everything to do with giving away, and that suffering will not be our end, but rather suffering will take us to a miraculous discovery that life can come out of death, opening our hearts, even though, and most possible because, they have been broken.

Like gravity, the Resurrection is everywhere; foundational. Such power, yet so faint. We just have to believe it. It takes a lot of courage, a lot of trust, a lot of dying. And yet when we give our lives over to the Jesus-way, we receive the most amazing gift, maybe even the gift to the universe.

Because in the despairing darkness, at the midnight of gloom, in a tomb too full, in the hell of someone’s making, you will be able to light a candle and say to the night, “I beg to differ.”

The Easter story is true! More than we ever imagined.

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