

Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4;

Matthew 28:1-10

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There is a quote attributed to Woody Allen: “If you want to make God laugh, tell him about your plans.” I think we all know what he meant, don’t we? We make plans, we work out the details, we assume to know how things should turn out. We have high expectations, especially if we are attached to specific outcomes. Truth is, we cannot predict, control or manipulate life. We don’t own the future.

When life does not develop as we envisioned it, we are greatly disappointed. Often, we even stomp our feet in protest and raise our fist to God. Experience tells us life isn’t always smooth or fair. Things don’t always go our way.

Reality can be perplexing. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary who visited the tomb found themselves bewildered, unprepared for angelic appearances or the unexpected earthquake. Yet, cosmic events, biblically announced,¹ had already begun to happen at the death of Jesus on the cross not too many hours ago.²

The two women were astonished to see the stone rolled away with an angel perched mockingly upon it. They couldn’t

¹ Joel 2:31; Amos 8:9; Exodus 19:18; Psalm 68:8; Jeremiah 4:23-26; Matthew 24:29-31; Psalm 95

² See Matthew 27:45.51; Jesus also made such predictions in Matthew 24:7.29

hide their pleasure from watching well-armed soldiers tremble in fear. The absence of Jesus' crucified body left them utterly confused, unable to comprehend what had happened.

For the past three days we have accompanied Jesus from the intimacy of a Passover liberation meal, where he broke bread, identified as his body, and poured wine, celebrated as his blood, and humbly washed the feet of his disciples (an action normally performed by slaves), to the garden of Getsemani where he prayed in great distress and sweat blood alone while his disciples slept.

We witnessed him being arrested by a mob and raced to a mock trial where false accusations were brought up against him. We followed him as he carried a heavy cross through the streets of Jerusalem all the way to Golgotha where he was nailed to a cross. We saw him endure human agony during a state-sanctioned execution, a capital punishment meant as a deterrent to criminals and insurrectionists. We watched him being placed in a tomb by a few close friends overcome with tremors of sorrow and perhaps a mixture of regrets, fear and dashed hopes. Then, we can only imagine Mary and the others trying to find their way back home in the dark and through the tears. Silence took over.

But not for long. A strong earthquake wakes up even the dead. A seismic cataclysm announces the prophetic and proverbial Judgment Day, the day of God's wrath. God has

rendered his verdict: evil has no place in the creative project of God and has been conquered; death has been overcome; and Jesus, the faithful Servant, who showed righteousness, perseverance and endurance, is risen.

He, who has come to give Life; he, who has shown us his non-violent Way; he, who has committed his life to give light to the Truth, has been vindicated. The world cannot silence Justice no matter how profanely cruel, how unashamedly deceiving, how dramatically dehumanizing, and how forcefully punitive it tries to be.

Jesus, who has come to embrace and not to exclude the poor, the sick, the women, the foreigner, the marginalized, the dispossessed, the exploited and the exhausted, who has come to affirm human dignity and not to disparage people through name-calling or scapegoating, who has commanded to put down the sword and learn to love our enemies, who has demonstrated the healing power of compassion, who has come to offer access to the Father and build the beloved community, has won.

In the eyes of the haughty, he was a logical, easy, convenient and stupidly non-resisting target, a disposable loser whose commitment to respecting people and treating them right has angered the self-righteous and exposed their moral corruption. He has become too radical, too controversial, too divisive: he needs to be eliminated.

The women were not the only ones to be perplexed at finding the empty tomb. Those who mocked him and tried to get rid of him were the ones to be ultimately fooled.

Woody Allen must have read his Bible, specifically the collection of songs and poems called the Psalms. In fact, the ancient song writer (or Psalmist) wondered aloud in Psalm 2:

¹⁻⁶Why the big noise, nations?

Why the mean plots, peoples?

Earth-leaders push for position,

Demagogues and delegates meet for summit talks,

The God-deniers, the Messiah-defiers [conspire together]:

“Let’s get free of God!

Cast loose from Messiah!”

[Meanwhile] Heaven-throned God breaks out laughing.

At first he’s amused at their presumption;

Then he gets good and angry.

Furiously, he shuts them up:

“Don’t you know there’s a King in Zion? A coronation banquet
Is spread for him on the holy summit.”

Indeed, the king of the Jews, who sits enthroned on the cross, has been glorified: his loyalty, his passionate and steady love, his trust, his courage to forgive, to mend and to heal are validated, acknowledged and rewarded. What looked like a shameful defeat has been revealed as the victory of God. Jesus is found right and is now risen: his

powerful word, his wisdom teaching, his approach to life and his very Spirit live on in us.

The angel at the tomb has a message for the two women: go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' (Mt 28:7) Jesus' dead body is not in the tomb: there is no risk of ideologizing a memory. The disciples need to retrace his steps and catch his Spirit back to where it all began in Galilee. Only by receiving his Spirit can they understand his gifts.³

The spiritual earthquake of Jesus not being dead but alive is scarier and harder to take in than the physical earthquake the women just survived. The spiritual earthquake shakes us at the core: if Jesus is alive, what now, what keeps us dead? What keeps us from believing in his word, from following in his footsteps, from trusting that life is stronger than death, that even death is not permanent, that love is mightier than hatred, that forgiveness is sweeter than revenge?

Certainly, Jesus' resurrection does not eradicate suffering. People still go hungry; the number of families living on the streets is increasing while affordable health care coverage is decreasing; bombs are still being dropped and nations brutalized, bodies are maimed and murdered while families are robbed of their livelihood and removed from their land.

³ 1 Corinthians 2:12

War reporters and medics are assassinated, while humanitarian aid agencies are prevented from bringing needed aid.

We seem easily prone to create enemies for political gain. The culture of mistrust, scarcity, fear and death is still prevalent. I figure God must stop laughing at a certain point and start crying, shedding tears for those who have no more tears left to be shed.

Easter is a happy day but not because it eliminates the ugly part of living. God never removed the difficulties from Jesus' life, never shielded him from the confrontations, the hurt, the loneliness, the betrayals, the suffering and the cross.

Easter is a happy day because in the thick of it all Jesus was unwavering in his trust in the constant presence of God in his life even when he felt abandoned and alone on that cross. By reciting the first line of Psalm 22, ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") he wanted to remind us of the trust in the benevolence of God, depicted as a midwife, midway through:

It was you who took me from the womb;
you kept me safe on my mother's breast. (v. 9)

You who fear the Lord, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
For he did not despise or abhor

the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me
but heard when I cried to him. (vv.23-24)

Jesus has learned throughout his life that God can be trusted, that divine justice will ultimately prevail, that God's Presence is consistent and eternal, that nothing can separate him from God's everlasting love, that in God he would enjoy abundance of true life, that he could endure anything for in God he would find courage to live the Truth and strength to endure resistance, that in God he would enjoy shelter and mercy in scorching days and cold nights.

Jesus knew that suffering and trials are part of life but those are not supposed to be an impediment to still be true to one's values and respond with dignity and treat others with respect. He never gave up his own power and lived a life of faith, trusting the faith of others to find power in themselves.

In his love until the end for us he trusted that God would sustain him, that God would never let go of him, that God would see him through. Although he did not seek the cross and prayed he would be spared that bitter cup, to him it represented the necessary means to demonstrate the extraordinary power of redeeming love: there is no greater love. Once we enter the orbit of that love we are changed and cannot go back, indeed do not *want* to go back: we are baptized into his death and called to new life.

When he was lifted up, he attracted all eyes to him.

Will the powerful take notice even as they claim to know him, pray in his name and at the same time commit crimes against humanity and against God?

What's going to take for us to understand there is no valid reasons to fight God's love in Jesus? Have you heard of any other God willing to be born in our midst, suffer and die out of love for us? Can He get himself any closer than that to us? And indeed, He can if we but make room for him in us. Our resistance will eventually melt away. Why push back? Why hide? Why run away?

The question we ought to ask is not "Does God love me?" but "Will I relent and receive God's love? Will I find rest in God's arms, on God's breast? Will I let God love me? Will I absorb the meaning of that love? Will I let that love transform my life from the inside out? Will I allow that love to open my heart and arms to my neighbor? Will I let compassion instruct me in the ways of justice? Will I dwell in his Word?"

May the resurrection of the Lord mean new life for all of us. May his Spirit live in us and carry on through us the renewal of the face of the Earth. May we follow him in the Galilee of our life and bring him honor by the way we love one another. Amen.