

A DAWN IN EVERY DARKNESS
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Easter Sunday
April 12, 2009
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

Mark 16:1-8

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices to anoint the body of Jesus. And so very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?"

When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.

But he said, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."

So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid.

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It's Easter morning. The sun is shining. And yet for many of us it's a dark time. The future is far less bright than it once was. A stone lies heavy on our hearts and it's beginning to feel like nothing can move it.

Early on the first day of the week, shortly after dawn, they went to the tomb with their heads down.

Which is to say, they went to the tomb the way some of us go about our lives, with our heads down.

They had been saying, "Who will roll away the stone for us?"

They were looking down. After all, they were realists. Death is death. Boulders don't budge. The world is solid and predictable. Death is final. Empires keep crushing innocent victims. Nothing will change.

If that sounds like you, then this day is for you. In case you hadn't heard, or in case you've forgotten, this world holds more wonders than we can count. There are openings where you see none unless you look up.

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had already been rolled back. And they were alarmed.

And why not? The world was suddenly not what they thought it to be. There was an opening where they assumed none would be.

I don't know for sure but I'm guessing some of you will leave here today in awe of what might be. For the Great spirit in the earth is the spirit of Christ. Which is to say, the spirit of the earth is the spirit of Love and that spirit is in, with, and for you and has been for fourteen billion years. Science has confirmed what poets could only surmise: we are stardust.

In life and death we belong to the holy, wondrous web of evolving life.

And nothing evolves us like love. (Hafiz)

The Resurrection of Jesus is a promise, a promise and a clue that love is stronger than death, that forgiveness is stronger than revenge, that hope is stronger than despair.

Some of us have lost or fear losing our jobs. Some fear losing their homes. Some have lost buckets of money. Not to worry: we can print more, which is, of course, a reason to worry. Yes, we can make more money. But we can't make hope. Hope comes in another way.

These are hard times. We have trusted in money to secure our future. We have trusted in never ending growth and prosperity. But our faith in things has let us down. We've banked on an illusion. It's time to trust the spirit of Resurrection and return to the ways that matter.

It's Easter morning and the sun is shining and yet for many it's a dark time. Some have lost loved ones—mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, and children. This parish alone in the past 12 months has been touched by nearly a dozen such deaths. One child of this community hangs to life by a thread. Eventually, he too will die. We all die. But the compassion that has arisen from this tragedy will never die. It's now part of this community's DNA.

Nothing evolves us like love.

Everybody and everything dies. Life is mortal. And yet, without death there'd be no life. What ever you do, don't take death personally.

Ninety five percent of all species have gone extinct during the 4.5 billion years of evolution. But life goes on. Which suggests that the spirit in this world is so powerful even death spawns life, life that becomes ever more magnificent, majestic, munificent and mysterious.

The Resurrection doesn't prove there's life after death. There very well could be life after death and it's fun to speculate about it the way Carl Sagan and others have. But the Resurrection in and of itself doesn't *prove* there's life after death. Long before the Resurrection most people in most places believed in life after death. We don't need the Resurrection to convince us of that.

Besides, our faith isn't in a singular, phenomenal historical fact, no matter how spectacular or verifiable. Those arguments are tiresome and misleading.

The Resurrection is about something else. The Resurrection empowers us to live a certain way before we die and simply trust God with whatever lies beyond. Because of the Spirit in the Resurrection we can be big, bold lovers in the face of all that haunts and taunts us.

It's Easter morning. The sun is shining and yet for many it's a dark time. Some of us have lost hope. War, racism, genocide, greed, deceit, diseases, pollution, gluttony, and famine rage on. The world is a hard place at times. But it's a good place.

Look around if you haven't looked for a while. Behold it is good. Not perfect but good. And on most days that's good enough.

We, too, are good. Not perfect but good. Yes, we mess up. Terribly. But the forgiving and gracious spirit of Christ weaves our sins and blunders and tragedies into a glorious symphony. Live boldly. Love boldly. Practice Resurrection.

The Spirit in, under, and through it all is the same spirit in the grain that becomes bread, in the grape that becomes wine, in the cocoon that becomes a butterfly, in the bulb that becomes a flower, in the darkness that becomes the dawn. And it's the same spirit in our stony hearts that becomes a bold lover of this earth and all that dwells therein. That's our niche in the web of life—to sing with gladsome voice its praises forever.

Thanks to Charles Darwin we now know more than ever just how marvelous life is. The story of evolution reveals the glory of the creative spirit that sacred texts only glimpsed.

We have only just begun to imagine the fullness of life. So much is in the bud. (Denise Levertov)

The proof of the Resurrection isn't the empty tomb. The proof of the Resurrection is a spirit-filled community including more and more of the world in its embrace. To paraphrase Clarence Jordan, it's not that Jesus arose and zipped up to heaven awaiting our arrival. It's that Jesus has risen and comes home with us bringing his tired, hungry, sick, lost and wounded friends, including Mother Earth, with him.

So, then, how shall we live?

You can meet Christ in "Galilee" where it all began. Which is to say, you can meet the Beloved One where your heart first awakened to the possibilities of faith, hope and love. You can meet the Blessed One where you once left all to give your heart to mending and healing the world with love.

Live boldly. Love boldly. Practice Resurrection.

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In the Bulb There Is a Flower

In the bulb there is a flower;
in the seed, an apple tree;
in cocoons, a hidden promise:
butterflies will soon be free!

In the cold and snow of winter
There's a spring that waits to be,
*Unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.*

There's a song in every silence,
seeking word and melody;
there's a dawn in every darkness
bringing hope to you and me.
From the past will come the future;
What it holds, a mystery,
*Unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.*

In our end is our beginning;
in our time, infinity;
in our doubt there is believing;
in our life, eternity.
In our death, a resurrection;
At the last, a victory,
*Unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.*