

Easter Sunday
Things that are above
(John 20:1-18, Acts 10:34-43, Colossians 3:1-4)

He is risen!

Today on this Easter morn we celebrate the stunning, glorious, wonder-filled, yet mysterious truth of resurrection. Today we stand with Mary Magdalene outside the empty tomb not quite sure what we are seeing, feeling confused and befuddled. Like Mary Magdalene we see Jesus but we don't see Jesus. So we reach out in trust, claiming this truth as our own--that death does not hold ultimate victory. This is the day where we reach beyond the earthly wisdom of reason and logic to the deeper, spiritual truth of God's eternal love and power. For Jesus is risen, he is risen indeed!

Music

Today, over and over again, we proclaim the truth of Jesus' victory over death. We are saying this particularly in our music. We sang:

*lift your glad voices in triumph on high,
for Jesus hath risen, and we shall not die.*

At the end of the service we will identify with victory over death when we sing:

*King of glory, soul of bliss,
Everlasting life is this!*

Of course all this bright sunlight, spring flowers in the fields, exquisite snow-capped mountains, sweet children singing in tune, beautiful lilies, laughing, and dancing doesn't just emerge out of nothingness. The backdrop for Easter is actually foreboding, sinister, ugly, plotting, and violent. And today, like any other Sunday, we don't show up at church looking pretty good out of nowhere. All through this week, as most weeks, there's been a lot of other stuff. Blisters, a heavy object accidentally dropped on your foot, a painful cavity, a sore back, a nagging cough, all these pretty normal human annoyances. Of course, it can be a lot worse.

A good place to get in touch with the Good Friday side of life is by listening to music anchored deep in the American experience, the blues, country, roots music. Here the lyrics are heavy into love gone awry, luckless attempts to find work, bad breaks, lonely evenings at the far end of the bar stool. So lately I've gotten re-hooked on Lyle Lovett, a long, tall Texan. In *Her first mistake* his attempts to catch the eye of a certain woman get him only this spicy rebuke:

*You are a lonely, weak, pathetic man
if this is doing the best you can.*

Or think of Billie Holiday singing the blues:

*My man don't love me
treat me oh so mean...*

The hard truth may well be that while some of us are singing *He is arisen, alleluia* on Sunday morning, there's a lot more folks just trying to survive a permanent state of their Saturday night. And while that first Easter it took only a couple of days to get from Friday to Sunday, for many people the distance from Friday to Sunday is much longer. It's not just days and weeks, its months and years. Maybe it's a life time. Maybe it stretches on for generations.

Anne Lamott writes about the reality of the Good Friday world we live in. Wars and famines far away, but much closer, in fact right at home, the reality of a mom with Alzheimer's disease.

Oscar in a Crescent City jail, fourteen thousand people still missing after Japan's tsunami, the ever-widening gap between rich and poor, children growing up without a father...how do we find our way through life's thickets? Lamott remembers a decal she once saw of a gorilla with the caption: "The law of the American jungle: Remain calm, share your bananas."

The least we can do is take one step forward. Be kind to one person. Light a candle. Share your bananas. Reach, stretch, try for the perfect high note.

I think of another favorite cd. David and Carol Krehbiel gave me some recordings from his San Francisco Symphony days. In a *Requiem* by Benjamin Britten, David is at center stage, in front of the whole orchestra, the lights dim, the audience hushed. Imagine the pressure. And then, all by himself, with no accompaniment, he begins, playing an open horn. It's as pure as can be, his one horn filling up the entire room. He plays on and has to reach for an incredibly high note. Every time he hits it without the slightest hiccup.

So this is my advice on this Resurrection Sunday. What does it mean to be a follower of the risen Lord? Even though it's Friday and drones are flying over distant lands. Even though it's Friday night and another marriage has crumbled. Even though it's Saturday and another luckless stiff who was once a baby in his mother's arms, has been shuffled off to jail. Even so, we do finally arrive at this day, Sunday. And so we remember to share our bananas. And we aim for the best, for the perfect high note, for the glory of all that is above.

The witness of the early church

Early Christian writers, pondering the meaning of resurrection, point us in this direction. Peter's sermon in Acts 10 reflects how the church explained the Easter miracle to those curious enough to listen.

Walter Brueggemann picks out four themes in Peter's sermon. The first is that the credibility of Easter is found in the visible, earthly teaching and healing of Jesus. Peter makes a point of saying that Jesus went about *doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil*. (v. 38) Then, Easter is for the faithful, for the church, for those with eyes to see, believe, and receive nourishment. Next, Easter mandates that the church not stay quiet but proclaim on the streets this Jesus news, a good news that will disturb the powerful, for it undercuts their control, refusing to be permanently bound by it. And finally, Easter is about forgiveness, something the authorities could not understand.

The little passage from Colossians is important to read this Easter morning. *Seek the things that are above*, Paul writes. He says *set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God*.

Living in the light of the Resurrection

It's a Friday-Saturday kind of world but we live in the light of, and in the confidence of, Easter Sunday. I understand it like this. Even though there are lies around us, we tell the truth. Even though things seem unfair, and we are getting the short end of the stick, we still do the right thing. Even though we are treated unjustly, we act with dignity, and we behave justly. Even though anger flares up in our face, and violence rises upon around us, we stand up to it with measured calmness. Angry words come our way but we speak words of peace. We live aiming for the high notes, setting our heart and minds on things that are above.

We live in the light of the Resurrection right into the darkness of the world. In John's gospel, when Mary Magdalene went to the tomb it was still dark. That morning, right in the middle of the

night's shadows, light burst forth, and resurrection joy bloomed in brilliant colors. This shocking joy forever changed the early disciples and propelled the early church. It became the source of their great hope, and ours as well. Paul writes *When Christ who is our life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.*

You know, there's a whole lot of Friday-Saturday around. Too many wars, too many economic downturns, too much depression, too much brokenness, too much defeat. In a little while we are going to sing
*Made like him like him we rise,
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies.*

Yes, there is no escaping it. We have our crosses to bear. Death is a reality. But we share in the hope of all that is possible, and all that is to come. We share in eternal hope that stretches from today to all that is to come. And it's not escapist to say so because we can and we must immerse ourselves in this world's trials and tribulations even as we cling to the hope our faith inspires. We need to sing into the shadows of life *Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!* We need to stand in circles and sing blessings to God and each other. We need to tell jokes to counteract the pain. We need long walks, quilting circles, knitting projects, baseball games, canning peaches, caring circles of friends, concerts and so much more to cultivate the hope within. In these places we share of what we have and are with each other. In these places we encourage and strengthen each other to reach for the high notes, to aim for the best, to live according to the most ideal of kingdom dreams.

Yes I believe in the Resurrection, in the reality of Jesus alive and within, in the possibility of new life and transformation. Thanks be to God.

Amen.

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--First Mennonite Church, Reedley