Easter 2020

The Story That Holds You in There

I greet you with the mystery and promise of Easter—each of us can have new life because Jesus has conquered death.

Years ago, I attended a clergy continuing education event in which Dr. Peggy Way, then a professor of pastoral counseling at Vanderbilt Seminary, challenged us to get in touch with, own, and rehearse the stories that “hold us in there.” You know, those stories of God’s in-breaking and in-dwelling love that “hold us in there” when all else seems dark, or chaotic, or hopeless and it feels like God has abandoned us.

I have several such stories in my life that I rehearse often in my prayer journal and in my preaching. In fact, many of you have heard these stories—stories of moving from death or despair or doubt or disillusionment to new hope, new expectancy, new joy, new faith.

Many of you have been guided in your Lenten journey this year by Tom Berlin’s book “Reckless Love” and the video reflections offered by the Dakotas and Minnesota Cabinets. Rev. Berlin reminds us that “Jesus ... died on the cross to offer us new life, no longer bound by the habits of sin or the inevitability of our physical death. Jesus understood that without death, there can be no new life ... The work of Jesus was to put sin to death, so that we could all find life.” This is Jesus’ ultimate expression of how to recklessly love with one’s whole heart, with one’s whole life.

You see, the resurrection story, the story of Christ’s “reckless,” sacrificial love and victory over sin and death is the story that holds us in there as Christians. Our power, our purpose, enthusiasm, and joy for life; our hope in the future; our desire to work for peace and justice; our ability to hang in there when facing the headwinds of a troubled, chaotic, divided world and church all spring from the mystery and promise of the resurrection story:

- The mystery of a stone being rolled away from the tomb.
- The mystery of new life emerging from burial shrouds.
- The mystery of Jesus coming alive in the hearts of sinners like you and me.
- The mystery of followers of Jesus sacrificing fame and fortune so that others might have abundant life.
The resurrection story holds us in there precisely because it touches us—it grasps us—with the raw power of God’s mysterious, unmerited, extravagant, reckless grace. The resurrection story holds us in there precisely because it proves God is in the business of bringing captives home, setting prisoners free, healing people’s wounds, wiping away tears of grief, raising the dead to new life in Christ Jesus.

Even though the healing may lie ahead of us, it is already a settled fact in the mind of God. God has already decided to heal the nations, to restore peace, to comfort the bereaved, to erase injustice, to deliver God’s people. God yearns to unbind each of us from our grave clothes and set us free. God yearns for each of us to sing to the Lord a new song—a song of resurrection.

You see, the promise of Easter is that Christ’s victory is our victory. That’s the story that “holds us in there.” You can have a new life in Christ this very moment—even as you are viewing or hearing this message. Christ can be born anew in your heart, unbind you from your death, and make you a resurrection person. That is the story—and I’m sticking with it!

May you, your family, and your congregation have a Happy Easter. Hold fast to the story that holds you in there. Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed!

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