

Easter Sunday

Year B 2021

In our denomination,

the Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America,

when individuals with
gifts for ordained ministry
are sent to seminary,

there are two
parallel processes
happening at the same time

over the course of about four years.

The first process is the classroom academics,

the Greek and the Hebrew
and the Bible classes
and church history
and the systematic theology
and preaching and Christian education,
and worship leadership,
and of course a smattering of electives, too.

But while all those *academics* are happening,

we students are also
responsible for maintaining
a ***second*** process:

the fieldwork.

Field education.

“Learning through doing.”

One of the Field education programs
that we all must complete is called

****clinical pastoral education****

and is designed to help us build
pastoral caregiving and **emotional intelligence**
skills.

CPE, as it's called,
often happens in
a chaplaincy sort of setting,

like a hospital or a
long-term care facility.

I did mine at
Northwestern Memorial Hospital
in downtown Chicago,

about 6 miles from where we lived
close to the seminary in Hyde Park.

A couple times each week
I would jump on the #2 or #6 express bus
and ride up the lake shore

to meet with my cohort of 6 students,
as we discussed the
interactions we'd had with patients

during our overnight
on-call shifts
each week.

And as we reflected
on these interactions together

we worked to encourage one another,
asking deep questions to gain insight
so that we all could improve and grow.

I remember one week
sharing about a
particularly difficult interaction I'd had

with a family
in the emergency room.

These folks were
visiting Chicago
from the UK,

and during their tour of the city,
their father had had a fatal heart attack
and they were, understandably, **wrecked**.

I remember
standing there amidst the chaos

and feeling wholly inadequate,
completely incapable of providing
any sort of words of comfort or care.

And later, in my reflections
with my peer cohort group,

I expressed to them my frustration
at my inability to connect deeply
with this grieving family,

and how I felt
that they hadn't received
the care they needed and deserved.

And my supervisor, Peter,
turned to me and asked,

“What are you most afraid of in life?”

“What am I most afraid of?”

I'm afraid of losing my family;
of losing people that I love.”

“Exactly,” he said.

That's ***exactly*** what they were dealing with.

They were facing
what were perhaps
their greatest fears

in a way none of us
ever expect to

especially while
so far from home.

[pause]

I wonder if Jesus's disciples
were feeling the same way
after ****his**** death.

They'd staked their
whole lives on this movement,

on this socially subversive message of
radical love and redemption and justice,
that was now ****gone****.

Messiahs weren't supposed to die...

they were supposed to
lead the revolution and change the world
and illuminate the holy city of Zion

like nobody had before!!

And now here they were:

afraid
scared
scattered.

***They were living
in the midst of their
worst fears!***

Even when

Mary and
Mary Magdalene and
Salome

show up to the tomb
and find that he's gone,

and are greeted by a
strange young man dressed in white,

it doesn't allay their fears...

no, it says,

“they were alarmed!”

This was not
what they had
expected.

And even further,

when they receive
this strange message
of a Jesus who is

“going ahead of them to Galilee”

they are gripped with

“terror and amazement”!

and they told no one and ***FLED***
for they were ***afraid!***

And boom, that’s where the Gospel ends.

The last word in the most ancient
Greek manuscripts of Mark’s Gospel

is literally the word “afraid”.

What a wild place to end the story!

All of the other stories of
Resurrected Jesus...

the eating fish on the lakeshore,

the doubting thomas appearance,

the Road to Emmaus...

those are all from
other storytellers.

Not Mark!

But of course we trust that
the women *did* tell of what happened,
and the word *did* get out,

but this, most early way of
telling the Jesus story

simply ended
in the midst of

a family

wrecked by
death and fear

running away in terror,

not knowing
what would
happen next.

Which is a wild way to end the story.

But it functioned in a particularly poignant way:

For, when people would
hear this story of Jesus
for the first time,

they would be
shocked by this
startling ending

and would then be
thirsty for more...

and would then be
drawn into relationship with
these Christ-followers

who proclaimed
the mystery of
a Jesus whose presence
was being made known
beyond death,

and whose movement
couldn't be stopped,
though he himself
had been killed!

Which is perhaps where
we find ourselves today, too:

being drawn into
the community of
the mystery of the Risen Christ

amidst so many
terrorizing fears.

We've also lost loved ones,
and felt a deep rift in our faith

as we've put
so much of life 'on hold'
with unexpected circumstances

and turns in the road.

But that doesn't mean

God still isn't
going to do
a new thing.

**For the
love of Jesus
doesn't stop!**

God is still
transforming us
and changing us
and fixing those

parts of our relationships
that are broken
in ways that

make it hard for us
to do what's right
in the world.

Which is maybe
that what resurrection
is about:

that Love that doesn't quit,
even when we're scared,
even when we're grieving,

even when the world
isn't what we thought it would be.

So beloved church, live in that love today.

Know that it is with us
just as it has been through the centuries.

Praise God!

Alleluia!

Amen.

