

“Patterns”

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St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky  
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Genesis 1:1 – 2:2; Ezekiel 37:1-14; Luke 24:1-12

I think it’s important to render credit where credit is due. They really tried. They tried hard to get the job done right. Judas’ insider-information on where Jesus would be, the well-choreographed trial by the priests, the public pressure put on Pilate to hand Jesus over. It’s tough to see much room for improvement. In fact, if it weren’t so evil, you could almost admire the cleverness and efficiency.

The Roman soldiers knew what they were doing. After all, they had plenty of practice, and how hard can it be drive three nails and hoist a person up? When somebody stops breathing and goes limp as a ragdoll, that’s usually a good sign they’re dead, and Jesus did die. But despite everyone’s best efforts, it didn’t work, at least not for long, because when you’re going up against the God of all creation, prepare to be disappointed, because no matter how hard you try, you are going down.

This is the God who made the palm fronds we waved around last week and the iron in the nails that went into Jesus’ feet and wrists. This is the God who made people! People created in His own image. Everything exists because God said so, literally. To borrow from the Beatles, “Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be,” and whatever God said after that just happened. And this wasn’t a one-off that happened in a span of six solar days, but over the course of billions of years God has kept creating time and stars and tiny grains of sands. Even now, God’s singing your name, just because He loves you, because He enjoys you, and if God stopped singing our names for a fraction of a nanosecond, we wouldn’t die. We’d disappear.

To create order from chaos, light from darkness, beauty from nothingness. **That** is real power. **That** is glory. Think you can shut that down with a cross? Think again. The cross was beyond awful, and Jesus has earned our everlasting thanks for the sacrifice of suffering he offered there. But the people who nailed Jesus down lifted him up. What they thought would be permanent was only temporary, and far from a setback, they ironically and unwittingly helped God emerge victorious over death, breathe new life into creation, and bring hope for the restoration and redemption and reconciliation of all creatures, including us.

And God does all that because God cares. He is a serial rescuer. Exodus and Ezekiel witness to that. A people enslaved in Egypt, oppressed and abused, cried out to God, and God listened and took action, went toe-to-toe with Pharaoh, who was no lightweight, and God tore that guy up like a dog with a chew toy. When push came to shove, God split the sea to make a way for His chosen people to escape toward freedom, and then brought it down on the people sent to drag them back to hell on Earth.

Now you might be skeptical about that whole sea-splitting business, and that OK. You can be a faithful Christian and have doubts about some of the miraculous events in the Bible. But here's one way to look at it. We all know the saying, "You break it. You bought it." The way I look at it, with God, if he made, then he can mess it. That's Exodus, and then there's Ezekiel.

Several centuries had gone by since the Exodus, and over the course of time, God's chosen people gradually forgot or chose to ignore their covenant with God. They hedged their bets by worshipping other gods. The economy had become unjust, the courts corrupt, and the kings went from bad to worse. People were being exploited, treated harshly. Israel was becoming more and more like Egypt.

So God called people like Ezekiel to serve as his prophets. Now prophets are often misunderstood. People see them as psychics or soothsayers, but nothing could be further from the truth. Prophets receive special wisdom from God to see what's really happening in the world, how that goes against the way God wants it be, what needs to change to make it right, and what will happen if nothing changes. Then God gives the prophets the courage share that vision with others, to speak truth to power, and the people decide.

Mostly, people decided to ignore the prophets, or worse, and the consequences were conquest and exile. Israel got clobbered not once but twice, first in the north then in the south. Many of them were taken away from the Promised Land and made slaves, a reversal of the Exodus liberation. Some of them never came back, but some of them did, and that's the feature of biblical prophets we often lose sight of. We focus on their dire warnings of destruction. That's really juicy stuff. But prophets devoted a good chunk of their time looking deeper into the future, deeper into the loving and forgiving heart of God, deeper into God's promises and purposes. And what they saw was hope.

In the valley of the dry bones, Ezekiel saw the aftermath of carnage, a symbol of a people utterly devastated, torn apart by their recklessness, their selfishness and infidelity, an arrogance that caused them to put God aside. But God prompted Ezekiel to prophesy to those long-dead bones, scattered and separated. God spoke through Ezekiel and the word of the Lord once again, as it did at the beginning, created life.

The bones came together, built up layer after layer with sinew and flesh and skin, until the breath of life entered into them. This vision served as a symbol that the wrath God wrought against His people would not last forever. Instead, they would someday be sent home, because even when you dump God, God will never dump you. That's a gift we ought not take for

granted or try to take advantage of, but it's a witness to hope that no matter how low you go in your faith, there's always hope for redemption.

Which brings us to tonight's main event, the Resurrection. Everything that's come before is prelude, designed to prepare, to establish a recognizable pattern. God creates and gives life. God rescues people in trouble, forgives those who forsake Him, and brings us back home.

When dawn broke on the third day, the people who worked so hard to kill Jesus probably woke up feeling pretty good. Best Passover ever! Across town, though, for the disciples, the past few days had been unendurable, but there was work to do. Best to get on with it. Jesus was buried in a hurry, so the women came with spices to properly anoint his body as soon as they could. Just one little problem with that plan. Open tomb, empty with no body.

Luke says that, "they were perplexed by this," which is perhaps the biggest understatement in all of scripture. Then two angels appeared reminding them of what Jesus had said, and they remembered. Like dismembered bones, it all came back together for them when they remembered, and Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary mother of James rushed to where the disciples were hiding, on fire with good news, with tidings of great joy. They must have been ecstatic, but the disciples just saw them as three hysterical women telling "an idle tale." Now ladies, whatever uncharitable thoughts you might be having about those male disciples, God agrees, but let's move forward and give Peter some credit, because at least he went and took and look and came away amazed.

And for the moment, that's where the story leaves us. Perplexed and amazed and overcome with joy. Now that might be hard to manage. Most of us grew up with this story, and even if we didn't, we know it well enough, and every year we gather in celebration and praise of the most wondrous event in the history of the universe our God created. But that's why we

worship, to try to re-live these moments, and allow them to enter our hearts and minds anew, because we need to.

Sometimes, we feel powerless and afraid. We feel trapped in Egypt under the iron mace of Pharaoh, exploited and abused, crying out for help, for relief, for rescue. The world's starting to look more and more like ancient Israel at two-minutes to midnight, and when the clock strikes twelve, it will be Exile time. We can feel broken and scattered, like the dry bones in the valley. We can feel like the disciples after the crucifixion, frustrated and disappointed. We can feel abandoned by God, left with no hope or clear sense of purpose.

Now Resurrection power rarely fixes any of that in the blink of an eye, because none of those things can be handled with a mere fix, and resurrection itself is so much more than a fix. It is the inauguration of a new reality in which evil's days are numbered, and the harder we strive to serve as disciples, as agents of the good news, the faster evil's days count down. If Jesus can defeat death itself, evil doesn't stand a chance.

We who know the story need to share it, without shame. If people think it "an idle tale," move on to the next person. You can't make someone listen any more than God can. And beyond words, there is a witness to be offered in the priorities we set and how we treat people with kindness and conduct our lives with dignity and integrity. But perhaps most of all there is a singular lightness of being, a peace which comes when the Resurrection lives in us.

I've been thinking about that a lot lately, especially this past week. It's been busy, but even when things around here are running at a more normal speed, I can be focused to a fault and tend to move quickly, like a human blur, and sometimes things get missed that need to be seen and heard. Don't pretend that you haven't noticed.

Now that type of energy may reveal something about the intensity of the resurrection power of Christ. After all, Peter ran to the tomb, and I doubt the women took their sweet time leaving the tomb to tell the disciples what they'd seen. But when it comes to the peaceful lightness of being, not so much for me. So here's what I've been trying to focus on during Lent. Learn to walk like Cary Grant. Look him up on YouTube and watch a clip from one of his movies. He glides like a man without a care or a worry in the world, and part of me suspects that's sort of how Jesus might have walked away from the tomb and into the garden.

Now that's just me. It's up to you to figure out what it would be, what it would mean for that lightness of being to be expressed in you. But the world needs to see and hear and know that Christ is Risen, and that nothing can take him away, not anymore; nothing can nail him down, not anymore; nothing can stuff him in a dark empty hole, never again. Amen.