

“The Senseless Truth”
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St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky
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Matthew 28:1-10

To speak of the resurrection defies common sense. Of the countless moments in the life of the universe, none carry greater meaning, yet no other remains so incomprehensible, than that split-second, that hallowed instant when Jesus rose from the dead in the darkness. To use mere human language, in an effort to describe or explain it, reminds me of King Canute, who in his wisdom gathered his people by the seashore.

At high tide, he commanded the ocean to recede, but it did not, and at low tide, he ordered the ocean to come forth, but the waters did not obey his summons. King Canute did this to show his subjects that all mortals suffer natural limits. So on this night, as we celebrate, hearts bursting with joy at the greatest supernatural event ever, we literally don’t know what to say about what’s happening.

But speak we must, as best we can, confident in the power of the Holy Spirit to push enough truth through us that the whole world might hear and shout with thanksgiving, weep in ecstasy, jump and dance and sing in response to the single most loving thing imaginable. To hold this story in is the epitome of foolishness, because nothing can contain it, any more than the grave could hold Jesus. If we don’t share it, then we don’t bear it. The only way to keep this story in is to kick it out. So we need to be brave. Nobody has a story like ours, and everybody needs it desperately.

For Jesus – humiliated, mutilated, executed – has triumphed. He broke free from the dungeon of death, whose torments and threat of annihilation we need no longer fear. Jesus defeated the powers and principalities that rely on subterfuge, intimidation, and violence, and he

did it with style. An angel, bright as lightning, revealed the tomb empty to the women at first light, and the earth quaked, mocking those who thought that God could be gotten rid of with insults and whips and nails.

But even that immense energy, the ground shifting underneath their feet, signifies nothing. It's just the firecracker that went off after the mile-wide meteor struck. When Jesus emerged from death, he unleashed the force of life, rippling across the world, transforming everyone and everything in its path, and that life force has never stopped circling the Earth, wave after wave, gust after gust, moving people to frenzied excitement at the freedom from fear, hope for the future, and peace in the present that Christ brings.

But if that's the case, then what about the other stories we know? Stories of war and murder and abuse; of injustice and poverty and slavery; of hatred without remorse, pride without shame, and pain without relief; these stories relentlessly roll over us. The savagery knocks us down. The tragedy crushes. We'd be lying if we denied the pang of disappointment poking into our souls, the questions and doubts that surface. Did the energy Jesus released on the day of Resurrection dissipate? Was it not as great as we've been led to believe? Those are questions worthy of being wrestled with, not faithless in the least, but honest and deserving of an answer.

In any great conflict, there comes a point when the outcome is decided, but the fighting goes on. Nazi Germany, that icon of evil, lost the Second World War years before the firing stopped. Historians differ on exactly when that was: December 1941, when they declared war on the United States; June 1942, when they invaded the Soviet Union; the Battle of Kursk in July and August of 1943. Take your pick, but throughout history, the fate of nations has been decided at a crucial moment, recognizable only in hindsight, when the tide turned irrevocably.

The crucial moment in history happened when Jesus left that tomb. From that time onward, the outcome had already been decided, the victory already won, but the conflict continues between the forces of good and evil, light and darkness, because God has chosen to give every person a choice. The force of life Jesus unleashed is not the type of force that killed him, the type of force that seeks to oppress and control. Rather Jesus allows and invites us to choose life, to choose love, because love cannot be love without choice.

After his rising, most people could not accept, would not accept, that God would act in such a way, because it did not meet their expectations, and ever since then, even among those who profess the faith, rejection has run rampant. People, including all of us from time to time, have chosen not to make the leap of faith, to jump from the old life of sin that leads to death and embrace the new life of grace.

For some, it's simply incredible, too good to be true. For others, the humble obedience required proves too much. Still more shudder at the sacrifice, the letting go involved, afraid of what will be lost, afraid of the struggle against those who despise the faith, the struggle with those who need waking from the slumber of their apathy, the struggle for those ignorant of or misinformed about what faith in Jesus means.

And ironically, what makes it so hard is that the climax of our faith story is the resurrection, a sacred mystery, a reality all its own, that defies reasonable explanation, but must rather be absorbed and felt and witnessed by a life that differs in a way that attracts and intrigues, that inspires others to wonder who we are and why, that stokes the fire of desire for that special, intangible called faith given by Jesus to those choose real life, real love.

So, yes, the battle goes on, ugly and some days seemingly hopeless, but with faith we know how it ends. Jesus started it. He will finish it, and in the meantime, we fight, not with the

weapons of war that blind and draw blood and inflict pain, but with the double-edged sword of God's truth, a sword that cuts the cords that bind, the sword that slices the veils that try to conceal and separate God from his children, a sword that heals by cutting away sin from the soul.

We sing the praises of Christ Risen until our lungs ache. Someone, somewhere, who needs to hear, will hear. We weep with joy and gratitude until our eyes turn red and sore. Someone, somewhere, who needs to see, will see. We show compassion and take the pain of those shackled to the whipping post of the world, a world that strives to dominate, that puts profit over people, and then we throw that wickedness into a tomb from which it will never escape. We tell the story, light on words, heavy on action, rooted in simply being a people altered by grace, full of faith, patient in the peace of knowing the victory's been won, but never complacent, always seeking ways of letting others know they have a crucial choice, an offer on the table no one else can match.

For the life force of Jesus keeps on circling the globe, washing over the waters, stirring up the sands of the desert, kicking up the dust of the drylands, swaying through the grass and the leaves and the trees, shifting human souls, shaking them up like an earthquake, shining a light into the darkness, a light that leads to life everlasting, to the hope and freedom and peace given by a love willing to die in weakness on a cross, a love too strong to stay dead, a love that's shattered the tomb and left it behind, so that no one else ever gets trapped there again. Amen.