

“Easter Life”

John 20: 1-18

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A mother struggled to share the meaning of Easter to her four-year old daughter. “Mommy, will the Easter bunny bring me purple jelly beans?” “I am sure he will bring you jelly beans,” she said, “but remember Easter isn’t about the bunny. It’s about Jesus.” Not convinced, the little girl persisted, “But will they be purple?” “Yes,” her mother said. “There will be some purple ones, but the important thing about Easter is how much Jesus loves you and me and the whole world.” For a four-year old, Easter bunnies and purple jelly beans are just way more interesting than Jesus. They make Easter fun.

Similarly, we often show up on Easter Sunday expecting little more than candy-coated cliches. But my guess is that, unless we’re four, we are looking for something more than jelly beans and chocolate to consume. We want to know something of what the mother was trying to get through to her daughter.

Her daughter won’t always be four, and, at some point, her daughter will encounter some dark night. When she does, she will need more than bunnies and jelly beans. Will it be when she’s bullied at school and feels like there’s no one to turn to? Will it be when she’s betrayed by a so-called friend? Will it be the day the doctor says it is more than a cold? Will it be when she is spoon-feeding her mother who once fed her? Will it be when her life’s work ends with a memo and a deadline to clean out her office? Will it be when she encounters some insidious human capacity for cruelty? She’s going to need more than bunnies and jelly beans. She’s going to need to know what Easter is all about.

Maybe that’s how the women felt that first Easter morning. It was so dark outside. Violence and fear hung over them like a dark cloud. Not only was it dark outside, it was dark in their souls. Where once there had been hope, there was only despair now. And while it was dark, they came to the tomb. There in the darkness of their lives they were surprised by the Life of Easter.

In the final analysis, Easter is about life. The mineral and chemical composition of the human body is 65% oxygen, 18% carbon, 10% hydrogen, 3% nitrogen, 1.5% calcium, 1% phosphorous, and less than 1 percent of a few other minerals. Add them all up and they are worth less than one dollar.

Now, place two fingers on your wrist. What do you feel? You feel your pulse. You feel the mystery of biological life pulsing through your one dollar’s worth of chemicals and minerals.

Easter is about the power of life, the power that makes one dollar’s worth of elements priceless. Easter is that power that gave us our pulse, calling us by name, and promising us that long after our pulse stops beating that power will go on. Easter assures us that this life, this abundant life, not only goes on forever, it is available here and now.

Having a pulse does not guarantee a full life. We can possess biological life without possessing “zoe,” the energy of God. We can have a heartbeat but no heart for living, an existence but no energy. We all know we are worth more than a dollar, more than the sum of our biological parts. And **that more** is the meaning of Easter. Easter taps into our longing for more. We might call it meaning, peace, or purpose. Augustine called it longing for God, the restlessness that only finds rest in God. Kierkegaard called it the leap of faith that quells anxiety.

All of us are seeking in one way or another. We want to know more. On our best days we think we might want to know God. For me, Easter means two things: Death is not the end and a pulse alone is not living. But if you are here this morning not sure exactly what Easter means, if you feel in the dark, you are in good company.

Three women come to the tomb thinking death was the end for Jesus. They walk in the dark presumably to prepare Jesus' one hundred pennies worth of minerals and chemicals for burial. They are resigned to the finality of death. We understand that; we know that resignation.

We know the the finality of death--the death of a beloved friend or family member. We feel in our bones the futility of life. The atrocities in the Ukraine because of war and random violence have convinced us that not much makes sense in this life. We are breathing; our hearts are beating, but they are also breaking. Did you show up today expecting sugar-coated cliches that do not touch the heart-wrenching questions of your life or bring comfort to your deep grief? You keep trying this Christian thing, but when you look at world, when you witness the Jesus Way manipulated beyond recognition, you don't see the proof of Easter's claims?

Does it help at all that the women who come to the tomb don't see Jesus? They get no proof. Does it matter that later, when Jesus does appear to the disciples, the first thing Jesus does is show them his scars. "Here's the evidence of the lowest point in my life, the time I felt most defeated," he said. His scars point not to his triumph but his tragedy.

Imagine how else this story could have gone. Jesus could have said, "Look, friends, it's me completely healed. Nothing they did to me has any lasting effect. I am perfect again." He didn't. He says, "I'm scarred and wounded, but these wounds will not keep the energy and life of God from flowing through me to you. And guess what? Just as God has sent me into the world, so I send you, not to cover up your scars, not to deny your wounds, but to show people that the same power that gave me life is alive in you."

Easter is not the promise this church will be like it used to be or even that our pulse will go on beating forever. It is a promise that the power that gave us that pulse will never abandon us. Easter is the promise that nothing in our past, present, or future has the ultimate power to define us. We are defined by "zoe," the energy of God, that flows through us making all things new.

Ministers make a huge mistake trying to prove Easter. Proofs amount to little more than jelly beans. You don't prove love; you embrace it. You don't prove power; you experience it. You don't prove life; you live it. You don't prove new life; you receive it.

Put your fingers again on your pulse. Just as blood is pulsing through your veins right now, the "zoe" of God, the energy of God, is pulsing through you, through all creation, making all things new. And that, friends, is better news than bunnies and jelly beans. Amen.