

Easter A 2011

I've been deathly ill, and I choose that adjective carefully.
For 3 ½ weeks, I was miserable.
I was the sickest I've been in decades.
I forgot how to sleep.
In one two-night stretch, I had a total of 20 minutes of sleep.
And this from a guy who can sleep anytime.
You told me that the color was drained from my face.
I had no strength.
But now, I'm back from the grave.
Once I was ill, but now I am restored to health.
And I like it.

It's kind of like times of discouragement.
You lose hope.
You can't see how to live with zest and courage.
You are overwhelmed by your circumstances.
You go through your routines, but you are somewhere else.
You're still walking, but there is no life in you.
You are the walking dead.
But then circumstances change, as they always do.
You begin living again.
Your hope is restored. Your energy returns. Your spirit renews.

It's kind of like grieving the death of a loved one.
I read through the names this week remembered through the flowers.
Quite a few of them I have buried.
When someone you love dies, it's like the life force is drained from you.
It's like your heart is buried in the casket with your loved one.
But then God works.
Through faith, your hope is rekindled.
Through the love of others, your ability to love returns.
You are able to see beauty again.
You can enjoy life again.
Your meaning and purpose for living is restored.

Consider the women that first Easter morning.
Discouraged, defeated, weak, spiritless, they made their way to the tomb.
The Master was dead.
The one who had given them so much life, so much meaning.
Dead and gone.
With broken hearts, they walked the path through the cemetery to do their duty.
They were there to anoint the body.
That meant to wash it and put perfume on it, so that family and friends could pay their last respects and cry their last tears.
Anointing a corpse, uhhh.
It must rank right up there with changing a diaper or dressing an open wound.
You do it because somebody has to.
No doubt their spirits and hearts were shriveled up.

That's when the strangest thing happened. As in:
Honey, the strangest thing happened to me on the way home from work.
Boss, the strangest thing happened today.

What was the surprise of the first Easter?
Why was the anointing of this body different from any other anointings happening at the cemetery that day?
Matthew tells us that there were a whole string of surprises.
First, the stone was rolled away.
The women were worried about that, but they needn't.
It had already been taken care of.
When God wants something done, it happens.
When God is at work, even the dead aren't safe.
Secondly, an earthquake shook the ground.
This was the ancient way of saying that Almighty God was making an appearance on earth.
The Creator God was alive and moving in our midst.
Thirdly, the guards were unconscious.
They represented the empire of the day.
But they were no match before the power of God.
No political authority can stand in the way of the might of God.
Fourthly, an angel came and sat on the stone.
An angel, mind you; a messenger from God.

Fifthly, the angel spoke an announcement from God.

It wasn't just any announcement.

It was the Easter announcement:

"Jesus is not here. He has been raised. Dead no more."

And if all that wasn't enough, as the women left the cemetery with fear and great joy, they met Jesus.

You heard me right; a face-to-face encounter with Jesus.

The same Master they watched die on the cross three days prior, they now have a conversation with him on Easter morning.

I would have liked to have been there when they explained all this to the disciples.

The strangest thing happened to us this morning.

I am captured by the verbs Matthew used to describe the women's initial reaction to the risen Lord.

They are found in the second half of verse 9: "They came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him."

Ah, the resurrection of Jesus reflected on the faces of the women.

That's why YOU are here this morning.

You are doing the same thing the women did that first Easter morning, and the Church has been doing ever since.

You come to remember, to experience, to be refreshed in faith.

You take hold of Jesus.

You worship him.

What is the significance of Easter morning?

If you are dead in spirit or body, and buried in a tomb outside the walls of ancient Jerusalem, or in Greenwood Cemetery in Virginia, Minnesota,

or if you are part of the walking dead,

Easter means life.

God acts to restore the dead to life, to give new life.

Easter means life after death.

Easter means life wins.

Easter means heaven.

Or as Paul tells the church in Corinth: "If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation."

Or again, Paul writes: "We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us into his presence."

Or as you heard in today's New Testament reading, from Paul's words in his letter to the Colossians: "Since we have been raised with Christ, we seek the thing that are above."

For you and I, who have come to, taken hold of, and worship Jesus the Lord, Easter means even more than being restored to life.

Easter means living life with an attitude.

It means we live with hope.

We will not give up.

We will not stop trying.

We will live in a spirit of trust in God.

Hear the words of Joseph Lauvanus, president of the Lutheran Church in Haiti.

As he walked through the ruins of the major earthquake, he told our bishop:

"We will not be defined by rubble, but by restoration, for we are a people of the resurrection."

Wonderful words.

He's talking about us, too.

We are a people of the resurrection.

Jesus, dead no more.

You and I follow him, by God's grace.

We will live in God's victory of life over death.

We will not be the walking dead.

We will be the Easter living.