

Easter Sunday

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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An estimated 2.8 million graduates will hit the workforce this May.¹ There's one phrase that will make these graduates cringe when they hit the job market: "experience required." Ugh. After years of studying along with a burning desire to make an impact in addition to mounds of debt these graduates will wonder, "does experience *really* matter?" Well, the emerging "experience economy" might argue that experience does matter, a lot.² Economically speaking, we've seen the progression from undifferentiated commodities turned into goods, then into services, and now into staged experiences. If you have no idea what that means, basically it's moving from, say, accessing coffee beans, to buying roasted or ground coffee, to purchasing brewed coffee from a store, to having a coffee "experience," like at Starbucks or Intelligentsia. Sure, we *could* make coffee at home for pennies a day, *but* it's an unparalleled experience to walk into a coffee shop with the smell in the air, the sight of mounds of coffee beans, all the while listening to the sounds of baristas preparing and delivering an encounter with coffee.

¹ <http://www.newsweek.com/2015/06/05/millennial-college-graduates-young-educated-jobless-335821.html>

² <https://hbr.org/1998/07/welcome-to-the-experience-economy>

Experience becomes essential in today's gospel reading from Luke as well. While the women didn't have caramelized honey lattes in their hands before visiting Jesus' tomb, they did have a vivid experience. Here they walked into an empty tomb and were perplexed, puzzled, and bewildered. "Wait one hot second," they wonder, "didn't we see Jesus die? Where is his body?" Then, enter two men who ask a poignant question: "why do you look for the living among the dead?" It's a powerful question. One we should ask ourselves more often. We look toward money and status to give us life, when it only drudges us deeper into stabilizing our portfolio while sucking the life we first sought. We look toward others with hope that they might bring us joy and satisfaction, even though arguments and miscommunication seem only to drain life instead of give it. We look towards presidential candidates on both sides who strategically use our deepest fears to garner our votes, while prisons and detention centers overflow, bellies go hungry, and schools remain shuttered. Throughout life we look for the living while standing among the dead.

Among the dead, these women are reminded of Jesus' promise. If it were a movie, we'd see a flashback here to where we first see him turning water into wine. Where this man helps a paralytic walk again. Where this guy restores sight to a blind man. Where this god-man walks on water and feeds the 5,000. Where Jesus raises a dead man from a tomb. Where Christ welcomed the outsider, the unlovable, the widow, the woman, the religious outsider, the self-centered, the egotistical, and the walking dead. There in that empty tomb, on that first day the women see these flashbacks firing off in their heads like fireworks on the 4th of July, and they remember, they get it, there they recall that Jesus

washed his disciples feet. There they remember that the religious authorities took his body and ripped it open. But right there, among the dead, Easter shows us that while we can kill God's love, we cannot keep it buried.³

Oh, man. *That* is what we need to hear today. That is the message of Easter. For this week has been wretched. Much like the body of Christ was broken open, so too we've seen bodies blown to pieces in Brussels, Turkey, Nigeria, the Ivory Coast, and even here in Chicago, where the homicide rate is now one death every 14 hours.⁴ Yet, today we hear that our God cares deeply about bodies. As one pastor puts it, "Maybe we need God to show back up on the scene after we've blown God's body up on a cross to show us, scars and all, that while we can bury God's deep love for the world, it won't stay. It won't stay buried under the rubble of Brussels or Turkey, not under the rubble of your crumbling relationship(s) or your self-hate. Not in the tomb where you've buried yourself under pounds of makeup [or doubt of self-worth.] Not under the asphalt of Chicago [or a mosque in Nigeria]... God's love won't stay buried, not as long as we keep telling this story...a story that, after 2000 years still refuses to die."⁵

³ Sloane Coffin, William. *The Collected Sermons of William Sloane Coffin: The Riverside Years, Volume 1*

⁴ <http://heyjackass.com/category/2016-stats/>

⁵ <https://endlessfalling.wordpress.com/2016/03/23/holy-week-and-resurrection-in-a-world-where-brussels-is-bombed/>

It is *that* story the women share first. Did you get that? Women, women were the *very* first people to share of the resurrection. Although we'll see Christianity entombed yet again in patriarchy and misogyny, here women were the very first to share. They were the first to share that Easter is about “powerless love winning over loveless power.”⁶ Yet, as sometimes stories go, those eleven disciples initially rejected it. For when people lack social capital often their voices mean little or nothing to the rest of society.⁷ We know this; we've seen it. We've seen people of color's experiences shrugged off, we've seen women's stories of unfair wages dismissed, we've seen same-gender loving relationships devalued, and we've seen xenophobia turn any outside voice into no voice at all. Yet, the fact that we even know this story of a 30-something year old, Jewish carpenter is attributed to those women. For when experiences are shared they can push others into action. That's not a hard thing to understand. It doesn't take but a few well-placed and well-written articles to send droves of people to the newest restaurant. So too, Peter hears the women's experience and gets up from that place and runs to the tomb. For experience can incite response.

And that's just it. Resurrection cannot be explained, but it can be experienced. I could stand here all day trying to explain what red is like, but if I took a (this) red crayon from our play space in the back and showed it to you, that, that would be more powerful.

⁶ Sloane Coffin, William. *The Collected Sermons of William Sloane Coffin: The Riverside Years, Volume 1*

⁷ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2819

So it begs the question, what is resurrection? What's it like? Well here's what it's like: Resurrection is like my family's boating trip. There we were on a rented speedboat in Florida. It was a sunny day and we were cruising along through some water canals. Finally, finally it was a "no wake zone," which, for my brother who was driving, meant: "lets see how fast we can make this boat fly." He throttled the boat and we started zipping along. As we were coming up on a curve we saw a few jet skis stopped to the side. My brother slowed the boat down, and then we saw them - dolphins! Now, to Floridians this is like seeing a squirrel, but to us Chicagoans this is like winning the Powerball! We sat there watching the dolphins, while other boats flew past us without second thought. Eventually we slowly drove away and two dolphins followed us. In our wake they were jumping out of the water, with their cute little dolphin smiles, and they were so close they could have jumped in the boat. We slowly moved along dolphins in tow, big boats zipped by us, and all the while we were giggling like young children, giggling among the beauty of God's creation.

Now, how is that like resurrection? Well, when I think about it, I'm admittedly a "type A" person who is overly busy much of the time – I sometimes take on more responsibility than is healthy, I hear the voice in my head telling me that "if I don't do it, no one will," and that frankly leads me running in circles, zipping through life like those boats missing the beauty. Yet, resurrection is that ability to realize that one more e-mail doesn't make me more valuable, that one more friend doesn't make me more loveable, and that one more dollar in my pocket doesn't make me more successful. Cause here's the thing, that's *not* the Easter story. That's a different story. As one colleague puts it, "That's a story where death is not defeated but idolized; where fear is not trampled under foot, but does the trampling. That is a story that experiences the dead among the living; that sees everyone as in the process of dying, so you better take what you can get while you can."⁸ Yet, resurrection is about experiencing something new. Resurrection is noticing and being aware. In resurrection you are changed and it can't always be explained. Resurrection is that moment when you finally find a "new normal" after someone you loved so dearly died. Resurrection is finding the right medication to manage your symptoms. Resurrection is finally having your relationship acknowledged with the title of "marriage." Resurrection is finding both a job and a home after being previously incarcerated. Resurrection is when you sleep in while the kids are gone. Resurrection is that brief moment when the gremlins of depression, anxiety, and the fear of failing finally let go. Resurrection *is* an experience.

⁸ Brown, Tim. Facebook post on March 22nd.

So on this Easter Sunday, step into the experience. In this holy place experience the smells of the incense, hear the music proclaim that death doesn't have the final word, taste the goodness of God's abundant and welcoming table of love, and feel, feel the baptismal droplets remind you that what the world says about your worth is hogwash. You are loved. Then leave this place empowered to share. Go and recognize that God is revealed across the universe. Be sent with eyes wide open to see that our God is bigger, more nimble, and more mysterious than we could ever imagine. My friends, resurrection is among us, resurrection is in you, Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.