

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Post-Traumatic Reality"
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Easter Sunday
Holy Communion

Easter is a drama of the greatest superlatives. God who became human, had a short ministry among us humans, who then as a human being challenged us enough that we put him to death. But in the greatest reversal of tragedy to victory, God takes this supreme unjust act and turns it into the greatest act of grace and access to relationship with God ever known.

In the greatest victory in human history, Jesus defeats death, his own, and then all of our deaths, all of us who believe, now have the promise of eternal life starting in this life, by the power of God the Father and the Holy Spirit; and in so doing becomes available to us all across the planet, and this promise lasts for hundreds and thousands of years. Is there anything greater? Now we have access to Jesus the risen one; who tells us not to be afraid, but to face our lives and our deaths with the courage of knowing the One who is Master of life and death. Jesus has gone before us and now is close to us who call on his name.

Easter is the quintessential drama. Evil is overcome by good. The hero rescues not only his friends, but the whole planet. The presence of God becomes available to everyone who wants to know more about him. The power of God once only available to a few in one nation and race becomes available to all. The promise of God which once was only available to a certain tribe and a certain family, now becomes open to all nations, races, language groups, economic classes, everyone, everywhere.

Frederick Dale Bruner once broke John 3:16 down like this: "God, the greatest subject ever; So, that is, to the greatest extent ever; Loved, which was the greatest affection ever; The world, which is the greatest object ever; That He gave His One and Only Son, who was the greatest gift ever; So that every single individual, whoever, which is the greatest opportunity ever; who is simply entrusting himself or herself to Jesus, which is the greatest commitment ever; would never be destroyed, which is the greatest rescue ever; But would even now have a deep, everlasting Life, which is the greatest promise ever."

All we do is say “yes” to the gift of a living and personal relationship to Jesus Christ, through God the Father and the Holy Spirit. And when we say “yes,” we give ourselves completely to this one who is our Creator and our Redeemer. We urge you to be clear in your mind that you are in personal relationship with God through Jesus, and if this is not clear, we can make sure you publicly profess Jesus here in this congregation, so there will never be any doubt in your mind. Also, the Scriptures encourage each of us, everyone, to publicly confess our faith. We do so in baptismal services, but we do so with anyone who would like commit their lives to Christ or re-commit them to Christ publicly.

There is a drama in this Easter story. But the drama also emerges from the trauma. Trauma is defined as serious injury to the body, as from physical violence; which is a good summary of what happened to our Lord on Good Friday. Trauma is also defined as an experience that causes severe anxiety or emotional distress, and the memories that persist after a trauma occurs. Trauma is an event or situation that causes great disruption or suffering.

So we know that our Lord received the greatest trauma ever known to humankind, an incredible torture to death, psychological and emotional trauma as well as rejection from most of his closest friends and family. On top of this, the sins of the world are placed on Jesus, God himself turned his back on Jesus, on the Cross, as the Son of God takes our penalty for sin on himself, the Holy God the Father turns his face away. That’s why he asked why he was forsaken and abandoned. He knew at some level it was the plan of God for our renewed relationship with God, but he went through the extreme trauma of this for us.

The followers of Jesus meanwhile were also traumatized. They thought he was going to set up the kingdom of God and Israel was going to experience their new golden age, better than the time of King David and Solomon. But they too went through great trauma, seeing their Master unjustly tried, at night, seeing him tortured, and some even seeing his death on the cross, and managing their reactions which, in Peter’s case, where he lost it, denying his relationship to the Lord.

So in the various readings of the Gospel, we have the women going to the tomb where Jesus is laid expecting to pay their respects. Instead they find puzzling information and supernatural clues. Mark only says Mary, Jesus’

mother, Mary, James' mother and Salome go to the tomb to pay their respects when they have a supernatural encounter with an angel.

They are told that Jesus is not dead but alive. They see the evidence that this is true, the stone rolled away, and other gospels tell us they see the burial clothes that are empty. They are told to tell his disciples including Peter who denied him, that he will meet them in Galilee. Mark then tells the story that they experience this, this complete reversal of what they were expecting, including the angel, and that they simply run away. Run away!

Mark records that they were trembling and bewildered and they told no one. Why? Because they were traumatized by all they had seen. Now eventually the other gospel accounts kick in and indeed the women tell the disciples what the angel had told them to say. But let's not miss the moment where they were trembling and bewildered. Another version translates it, "terror and amazement had seized them." And many scholars believe Mark's gospel ends here. From my point of view, this does not contradict the other gospels. All it does is give us a perspective that we need to hear today. That perspective is this.

God wants to meet us in our trauma or post-trauma. That's as true for soldiers coming back from war, as it is other great losses and challenges. God does not wait for us to paste a big smile on our faces before he meets us. He meets us in the difficult stuff, in our brokenness, in our losses.

My brother came back from Vietnam a broken person in many ways. The US would not even admit the war was a war, it was a "conflict." And he received no help for his post-traumatic stress and many physical and emotional wounds. My other brother never went to war, but has struggled the rest of his life with drug addiction and alcoholism. I too am recovering from the effects of alcoholism and other character defects.

God wants to meet us all in the lowest places of our lives, not so much the highest ones. Those women were confused and wondering what this all could mean. People don't raise from the dead, so they thought, so what did this really mean? But in fact, Jesus did break that universal rule. He did rise from the dead and does provide us hope and meaning and motivation where we have little or none.

Easter brings the depth of existential reason for living well and dying well. Jesus cares for you and for me. We need to re-visit both the drama of Easter and the trauma. And as we do, God meets us, helps us, transforms us, and so our Christianity is no longer a religious project that I have to keep up, but a relationship to a person who loves me and meets me like no other.

Let us pray.