

Easter Day
1 Corinthians 15:1-26; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Luke 24:1-12
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Juanita and I had thought for awhile that we would go see my brothers this summer in France and the Ukraine. When we looked into plane fares and other expenses, we determined we couldn't go. We were disappointed. Then last Sunday happened. Thanks to the exceptional generosity of many of you, a large check was given to me to cover our travel expenses. We're making arrangements to visit Eastern and Western Europe in July.

The disciples and others had expected that Jesus of Nazareth would be the one to finally get Israel back to a place of prominence in the region. He was attracting large crowds and outwitting the most learned Jews. He was fearless and capable of powerful deeds. A showdown was brewing in Jerusalem, and, unfortunately, Jesus ended up getting the short end of the stick. Not only was he taken down a notch or two; he was executed.

We can hardly imagine the disappointment his followers felt as they watched their leader and their hopes for better lives dashed before their eyes. Juanita's and my disappointment clearly paled in comparison to the disciples'. Then for them this Sunday happened.

Everything written in Luke's version of the resurrection as well as all the other gospels suggests those closest to Jesus never saw it coming. The women went to the tomb with spices necessary to sweeten up a decaying body. An empty tomb caused them to be perplexed. Had they come to the wrong place? Was Jesus actually in another section of the cemetery?

Two mystery men in dazzling appearance confirm the location but further confuse and frighten the women. This morning has gone from bad to worse so far for these poor women. Then the strangers pose a startling question. "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" "Why do you think Jesus stayed dead? Don't you remember what he told you?"

Of course they don't remember because all they knew was that dead people stayed dead. You live and then you die and that's that. One life to live, then it's over. Humans had one ending for this story – burial spices. God had another ending – resurrection appearances.

The resurrection of Jesus is so surprising and unexpected, it had to have happened. No one could make up a story like this that changed a few people and started a faith still going strong 2,000 years later. This can't be the result of human efforts. Human efforts alone end in death. We have limited life. God has no limits. God is never empty – no beginning, no end. By faith and baptism, we get on that train that never reaches the end of the line.

Easter Sunday was first and foremost God's answer to Good Friday. Church and state conspired to kill a threat to both. If Jesus stays dead, they win, then were right, and Jesus was all hot air, full of highfalutin ideas of a peaceable kingdom, where everyone has enough and no one goes without – one family under God, where everyone has first-son status.

Easter Sunday vindicates Jesus and validates all his teaching about how to live in the Kingdom of God on earth as in heaven. Easter Sunday was then, but it is also now. It means we can be delivered from our Good Fridays. We have days when we feel that the sun doesn't shine. We have times when our troubles seem to never end, when we want to give up and quit the human experiment.

I got an email yesterday from a friend, who a year ago told me he wanted desperately to make a longtime dream a reality. He wanted to start an online spiritual resource called "The Pilgrim's Companion." He needed capital and sent out an appeal for funds to everyone he knew. Only four people responded -- nowhere near enough to launch his project. He writes, "Just as I was on the edge of despair and preparing to return the checks, a small miracle happened." A friend who once worked for Apple Computers called and suggested alternative computer programs, reducing his costs considerably. Then, unexpectedly, this same friend offered to pay for the new software. Now with the help from the others, my friend is nearly ready to go online with a creative, Christian resource.

Good Friday moments turn to Easter by the God who brings life from that which is or seems dead.

Guide Posts Magazine told the story of a woman whose only son was tragically killed in a car accident. Her Good Friday grief lasted more than three days as you can imagine. A year later in the fall, she discovered some jonquil bulbs in a bag in her garage. She had bought them before her son's accident, but, of course, never planted them. She thought, maybe now, planting some bulbs on a sunny day would cheer her up.

She prepared the ground and started to place the bulbs in the ground. Things were going fine until a bulb crumbled in her hand -- then another and another. "Dead!" she cried, as she tossed the bulb dust into the air. Angry and crushed, she gave up. Winter came and went. When spring finally arrived, she looked out her window to see what she described as a "field" of bright yellow jonquils. She said, "I stood before the unexpected garden. And clearly, as if spoken aloud, I heard the promise, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.'"

The resurrection of Jesus gives me confidence daily that there is nothing that can happen to us that God can't redeem and use for good. It is God's business, God's livelihood to turn bad to good and good to better.

The women on Easter morning were doing the best they could. They were showing up to give Jesus a proper burial in the last place they'd seen him. If we do the best we can, and keep showing up where we think Jesus might be, we too may be in for a surprise too good to be true. Amen.