

“The Door of Resurrection Hope”

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Malcolm Muggeridge, English journalist, author and deeply devoted Christian, put into a single sentence the mystery of resurrection hope. He writes, “Jesus audaciously transformed death from a door that used to slam into a door that opens to all who knock.” The door of resurrection hope. It opens, it opens. The word for “door” in the New Testament (*thura*) has three meanings. A door can be a literal 2.5 by 6.5 foot object with a handle, and it can also refer to a simple opening in a cave or tomb. But more interesting still, a door can be “a favorable time for accessing a possibility.” And it is just like hope to make life, itself, an opening, and so “open-ended” that even death, although real, is another opening within the Heart of God, our true home.

Now, you may be tired of hearing about doors, the metaphor we have used each Sunday throughout Lent. So on this Easter morning, consider with me the well-known symbol of the “egg.” I read somewhere this week that over a billion eggs are dipped and dyed every Easter in America, and I’m not counting the plastic ones you get from Michael’s. The Easter egg is important for at least two good reasons. Jesus’ final journey to Jerusalem brought him there to celebrate Passover, and, as you may know, one of the ritual foods arranged on everyone’s Passover plate was a hard-boiled egg. Scholars suggest that the egg came to symbolize the ritual sacrifice made in the Temple, and, after the Temple was destroyed, the egg became a “mourner’s” reminder. Yes, the Easter story begins with mourning, and so this mourner’s reminder has meaning for us.

Now rather different stories emerge from that first Easter, but all four of the gospel writers agree that instead of mourning a death, whoever dared to visit the tomb was stunned that it was “empty,” void, vacant. Empty, that is, inadequate in an attempt to bury life. An April Fools’ prank, perhaps, on death, itself; death has always maintained that it would have the final word. And according to St. John, Mary Magdalene was not only stunned but the first to be awakened by a Voice. And what she hears, she shares with others, and the message included that Jesus would evidently meet them in Galilee, where their wild adventure with him had started. And if they would meet him there, it would not be for a meal of mourning.

Last Sunday, I went with some of you to the Clallam Bay Prison for Men, to attend the ending ceremony of a Kairos Ministry Weekend. And as I listened to the men tell story after story how resurrection hope had touched them, I couldn’t help think how Easter is mostly a prison break-out story; not just their story, but your story and my story, for I suspect we all are imprisoned in at least one area in our lives. The door of resurrection hope still opens, and the Voice is still heard: “Do not be afraid. Expect to meet me in the strangest of places.” So the egg also symbolizes the container from which we must break out.

I have written two endings to my Easter message, not sure in the writing the one I would offer. Here's one of them; I'll send the other via email.

On the day before Christmas in 1981, a little girl by the name of Mary cried the sad tears of a 7-year-old, who said goodbye to Odessa Williams, an elderly friend who attended Mary's church. She said good-bye at Odessa's funeral on the morning on the 24th of December, and Mary cried all morning long. And she worried. It was beginning to snow that day, and she worried that it would be cruel to put Odessa into the ground on such a cold, dark day. When she finally made her way to the casket that morning, she reached out and touched Odessa's cold, stiff fingers. And Mary cried even harder than before. Later that same night, Mary was to play the mother of Jesus at the Christmas pageant. Oddly enough, the manger stood almost in the very spot the casket rested earlier that morning.

In the middle of the production, some-thing unrehearsed happened. Gazing into the manger, 7-year-old Mary slipped her hand into the box and touched the Jesus doll in diapers. And all at once, as if she had made a sudden decision, she picked up the doll by the toes and skipped down the steps of the chancel, down the side aisle of the church into a room on the right. A few seconds later, the child emerged carrying nothing at all. She returned to the manger, knelt down, and gazed upon the empty straw. Her face was radiant and her tears were peaceful. Driving home after the pageant, she said to her father, "Dad, Jesus wasn't in the manger; that was a doll. Jesus doesn't have to be in the manger does he? He goes back and forth, doesn't he; he's coming and going all the time. Right?" And then looking out the side window Mary said more gravely, "Mrs. William's box is empty too. I figured it out. We don't have to worry about the snow. It's only a doll in her box. It's like a big doll, Dad, and we put it away today." (*The Manger is Empty*, Walter Wangerin)

Easter is never all that far from Christmas, you know. The living Christ, the Voice we almost hear, the Presence so deeply felt cannot be contained in a tomb kept from us and our world, not even from those in a fortified prison. We do not have to worry about the cold ground or dank tomb. Christ comes and goes! Alleluia, Christ comes and goes. Comes and goes, still.