

RESURREXIT SICUT DIXIT! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA! HE IS RISEN AS HE SAID! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!

There is a tradition in the Church called a RISUS PASCHALIS – an Easter joke. It comes from the church's reflection on the fact that God played the greatest joke of all time on the devil by raising Jesus from the dead. On Good Friday, the devil thought that he had won. But Easter proved him terribly mistaken. The joke was on him. So here is your risus paschalis. Ed and his wife Norma go to the state fair every year. Every year Ed would say, "Norma, I'd like to ride in that helicopter." Norma always replied, "I know Ed, but that helicopter ride is 50 bucks!" One year Ed and Norma went to the fair, and Ed said, "Norma, I'm 75 years old. If I don't ride that helicopter, I might never get another chance." To this, Norma replied, "Ed, that helicopter ride is 50 bucks, and 50 bucks is 50 bucks." The pilot overheard the couple and said, "Folks, I'll make you a deal. I'll take the both of you for a ride. If you can stay quiet for the entire ride and don't say a word I won't charge you a penny! But if you say one word it's 50 dollars." Ed and Norma agreed and up they went. The pilot did all kinds of fancy maneuvers, but not a word was said. He did his daredevil tricks over and over again, but still not a word. When they landed, the pilot turned to Ed and said, "By golly, I did everything I could to get you to yell out, but you didn't! I'm impressed!" Ed replied, "Well, to tell you the truth I almost said something when Norma fell out, but you know, 50 bucks is 50 bucks!"

OK, down to business. There is a small detail in Mark's resurrection account that we could easily miss in our eagerness to hear about Jesus raised from the tomb. Mark says that in the darkness, on the morning of that first Easter, a small group of women, followers of Jesus, went to the tomb to dress His body with spices. Remember, it was Judea. We know that a body begins to decay at the moment of death. But in Judea, the temperatures climb during the day. In just a day or so, a loved one's body becomes extremely unpleasant to be around. To put in the King James, stiff-upper-lip version: Me thinketh it Stinketh!

So here are the women coming out to dress the dead body of the one whom they had loved. Of course, the covering of a dead human with spices provided only a meager, temporary reprieve from the reality of death. Death is about decay. The women with their handful of spices, seen from this point of view, are a rather sad, pitifully ineffective response to the reality of death.

But look at how human it is! What do WE do at the time of a loved one's death? We attempt to console and comfort with simple, homey phrases like, "Well, he has gone on to a better place," or "She will live on in our memories." But we don't want our loved ones to leave us. We want them as they were; here, with us. We don't love our memories about them; we love them. Sometimes when someone dies and says "Meg died this morning," we get out the recipe for chocolate pie – the one that Meg enjoyed so much at the parish potluck only a few months ago – and we begin making a pie. That is all we've got to say or do in the face of death. How is that going to change anything?

Well, our feeble attempts to console with our words, our pies and rolls and meals and flowers, and those famous women's handfuls of spices – mean this: although we are frail, mortal, finite human beings and we are totally inadequate in our words and our deeds in the face of death, God – the one who creates life and gives life – is determined to be the creator and giver of life even in death. Because Jesus is raised, we are bold to believe that we also shall be raised. The one who was cruelly, brutally killed is the one who rises, and in love, He is determined to not rise alone. Christ brings us along with Him for the ride. He reaches into the horror of death – all the pain and the grief and all of our rather pitiful, inadequate responses – and He makes one grand response of His own. He is raised! (adapted from Willimon, PULPIT RESOURCE, April-June 2012, p. 14-15) This is the great good news of Easter we celebrate today.

Second, so what do we do in response? What do we do because Jesus Christ is raised? We offer our handful of spices in the best way that we possibly can. We LIVE! And we live with passion, purpose and intention. We live Easter lives NOW. Some of the saddest stories are about calls that never get answered, risks that never get taken, generosity that never gets given, adventures that never happen, lives that never get lived. We've all met people who are merely going through the motions. They died years ago but are just too cheap to pay for the funeral! There is an entire field of study in the social sciences around the psychology of regret. One of the most striking findings is the way that regret changes over the course of our lives. Short-term regrets most often involved wishing we hadn't done something: I wish I hadn't eaten that last piece of pie. I wish I hadn't asked that girl out and been rejected. I wish Bishop Zarama hadn't sent me to St. Andrew's! JUST KIDDING!

The world of social media even has an acronym for this one: YOLO – “you only live once.” This is associated with the reckless pursuit of fun while throwing off the consequences of reason and responsibility. It is most often used when you choose the bad option: “Who knew the state police was so picky about texting while driving 85 mph? – YOLO.”

But over time, our perspective shifts. As we get older, we come to regret those actions that we DID NOT TAKE. The word of love we never spoke. The chance to serve we never took. The generous gift we never gave. We begin our lives regretting the wrong things we have done, but we end them regretting the good things we failed to do. What do we need to do now so that we're not living in regret then? Live an Easter life! One that will enable us to say at the end of it, “Here, Lord is what I did with all that you gave me – my little handful of spices -- I hope you are pleased – it was such a wonderful ride – I'm so grateful you gave me the chance to walk on this glorious earth.” (adapted from John Ortberg, ALL THE PLACES TO GO, p. 42-43)

So if you had to summarize your life in 6 words, what would they be? Several years ago an online magazine asked this question. It was inspired by a possibly legendary challenge posed to Ernest Hemingway to write a 6-word story that resulted in the classic “For sale: baby shoes, never worn.” The magazine was flooded with so many responses that the site almost crashed, and the responses were eventually turned into a book. NOT QUITE WHAT I WAS PLANNING is filled with 6-word memoirs by writers ‘famous and obscure.’ They range from funny to ironic to inspiring to heartbreaking:

\*\*\*“Cursed with cancer. Blessed with friends.” (written not by a wise, old grandmother but by a 9-year-old boy with thyroid cancer). \*\*\*“The psychic said I'd be rich.” (actually they might be richer if they stopped blowing money on psychics!) \*\* “Not a good Christian, but trying.” \*\* “Thought I would have more impact.”

It is striking to think about what the characters of Scripture might write for their 6 word memoirs. I think they would revolve around the intersection of the story of that person's life with God's story. They would all be inspired by a divine opportunity that God had set before them and the response – the yes or no – that shaped their lives.

\*\*\*Abraham: “Left Ur. Had baby. Still laughing.” \*\*Jonah: “No. Storm. Overboard. Whale. Regurgitated. YES!” \*\*Moses: “Burning bush. Stone tablets. Charleton Heston?!” \*\*Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: “King was hot. Furnace was not.” \*\*Noah: “Hated the rain, loved the rainbow.” \*\*Esau: “At least the stew was good.” \*\*Prodigal Son: “Bad. Sad. Dad glad. Brother mad.” \*\*Zacchaeus: “Climbed sycamore tree. Short, poorer, happier.” \*\*Good Samaritan: “I came, I saw, I stopped.” \*\*Paul: “Damascus. Blind. Suffer. Write. Change world.” \*\*Mary: “Manger. Pain. Joy. Cross. Pain. Joy.” (adapted from John Ortberg, ALL THE PLACES TO GO, p. 1-5)

“Not quite what I was planning” is the 6-word memoir any of them could have written. And probably so could each one of us here this day. What we do with what we are handed determines who we become in the end. Martin Luther King, Jr wrote: “You may be 38 years old, as I happen to be. And one day, some great opportunity stands before you and calls you to stand up for some great principle, some great issue, some great cause. And you refuse to do it because you are afraid....You refuse to do it because you want to live longer....You’re afraid that you will lose your job, or you are afraid that you will be criticized or that you will lose your popularity, or you’re afraid that somebody will stab you, or shoot at you or bomb your house; so you refuse to take a stand. Well you may go on and live until you are 90, but you’re just as dead at 38 as you would be at 90. And the cessation of breathing in your life is but the related announcement of an earlier death of the spirit.” (quoted in Richard Rohr, FROM WILD MAN TO WISE MAN, p. 169)

Third, a story of Easter living from the long-running TV series MASH. The story concerns a young soldier, an accomplished pianist, who is injured in the war. He loses his right hand and will never again be able to play the piano. Dr. Winchester, the MASH unit’s brilliant but arrogant surgeon from Boston, encourages the young soldier not to give up or give in to his disability. He finds some classical music pieces written specifically for the left hand. But the soldier is not moved; he does not want to become, in his words, ‘some kind of freak pianist.’ Finally, Winchester tells him: “David, don’t you understand that you have a gift? I can play the piano. I can play the notes. But I never had the gift to make the music. Oh, as a surgeon, I can make a scalpel sing, but what I wanted more than anything in the world was to play the piano. But I was never given that gift. You have it, and though you may not be able to use one of your hands, you can use the gift to teach, to write, to conduct. You have the passion.”

Passion is that driving, resurrection force that pulses within us from the very center of our being. When we live life with passion, we find ourselves, our truest selves. We find who we are in God’s heart. We discover our true vocation in life. We discover what to do with our handful of spices. We discover resurrection. Passionate, resurrection people are those who have the eyes of their hearts focused on a single goal, a solitary dream, a spectacular view. They never lose sight of others around them, but they know what they must do and who they must be to achieve a sense of being whole. They live with intention, passion, and Easter purpose. They live LIKE CHRIST. May it be so for you and for me. Amen.

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