

OK, your response is ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA! Resurrexit sicut dixit! Alleluia! Alleluia! He is risen as He said! Alleluia! Alleluia!

I remind you of the Easter tradition of the 'Risus Paschalis,' an Easter joke, because God played the greatest joke of all time on the devil, who thought he had triumphed on Good Friday. But God raised up Jesus on the third day, and had the last laugh.

A Florida senior citizen drove his brand new Corvette convertible out of the dealership. Taking off down the road, he pushed it to 80 mph, enjoying the wind blowing through what little hair he had left. "Amazing," he thought as he flew down I-95, pushing the pedal even more.

Looking into his rear view mirror, he saw a Florida State Trooper, blue lights flashing and siren blaring. He floored it to 100 mph, then 110, then 120. Suddenly he thought, "What in the world am I doing? I'm too old for this!" And pulled over to await the trooper's arrival.

Pulling in behind him, the trooper got out of his car and walked up to the Corvette. He looked at his watch, then said, "Sir, my shift ends in 30 minutes, and today is Friday, and I'm supposed to be beginning my vacation. It will take me 45 minutes to write this all up and ticket you. If you can give me a new reason for speeding – a reason I've never heard before – I'll let you go..."

The old gentleman paused, then said, "Three years ago, my wife ran off with a Florida State Trooper. I thought you were bringing her back."

"Have a good day, Sir," replied the trooper.

Before I dig into things, I want to say how good it has been to celebrate this week with PEOPLE! Last year, we did the whole triduum with a small team – about 10 total – in front of a camera. This has been such a treat to have you here. Thanks for coming!

First, a little resurrection theology. Often theologians try to simplify the meaning of the resurrection by packaging its essence into one sentence: in the resurrection, God vindicated Jesus, His life, His message, and His fidelity. What does that mean?

Jesus entered our world preaching, faith, love, and forgiveness – but the world didn't accept that. Instead, it crucified Him, and in that crucifixion, seemingly shamed and silenced His message. We see this most clearly on the cross when Jesus is taunted, mocked, and challenged: If you are the Son of God, come down from there! If your message is true, let God prove that right now! If your fidelity is more than plain stubbornness and ignorance, then why are you dying in shame?

And the response of God? Nothing. No commentary, no defense. Just silence. Jesus died in silence. Neither He nor the God He believed in tried to fill that void with any consoling words or explanations challenging people to look at the bigger picture or to look at the brighter side of things. None of that. Just silence.

Jesus died in silence, inside God's silence, and inside the world's incomprehension. And we can let ourselves be scandalized by that silence, just as we can let ourselves be perpetually scandalized by the seeming triumph of evil, pain, and suffering in our world. God's silence can forever scandalize us: in the Jewish holocaust, in ethnic genocides, in brutal and senseless wars, in the earthquakes and tsunamis which kill

thousands of people and devastate whole countries, in the deaths of countless people taken out of his life by Covid or cancer, by violence, in how unfair life can be sometimes, and in the casual manner that those without conscience can rape whole areas of life seemingly without consequence. Where is God in all of this? What is God's answer?

God's answer is in the resurrection, in the resurrection of Jesus and in the perennial resurrection of goodness within life itself. Evil does what it does, natural disasters are what they are, and those without conscience can rape even as they feed off the life of others. God does not intervene. The parting of the Red Sea is not a weekly occurrence. God lets His loved ones suffer and die, just as Jesus let His dear friend, Lazarus, die, and God let Jesus die. God redeems, raises us up afterwards, in a deeper and more lasting vindication. And the truth of that statement can even be shown empirically.

Despite every appearance sometimes, in the end, love does triumph over hatred. Peace does triumph over chaos. Forgiveness does triumph over bitterness. Hope over cynicism, fidelity over despair, virtue over sin. Life does triumph over death. And good does triumph over evil, always. Mohandas Gandhi once wrote: "When I despair, I remember that all through history, the way of truth and love has always won. There have been murderers and tyrants, and for a time they seem invincible. But in the end they always fall. Think of it, always."

The resurrection makes that point emphatically. God has the last word. The resurrection of Jesus is that last word. From the ashes of shame, of defeat, failure, and death, a new, deeper and eternal life perennially bursts forth. Our faith actually begins at the very point where it seems it might end, in God's seeming silence at Jesus' death. (adapted from Rolheiser, posting of 3/10/21)

Second, Basil Pennington tells the story of Joshua Sasaki Roshi, an eminent Zen master from Japan, who was conducting a retreat at a Christian monastery. Sensitive to the nature of his surroundings, the Master had asked for a copy of the New Testament. Carefully studying the New Testament writings, he was able to offer many startling insights to the Christian monks from their own Bible, even though it was his first encounter with the Scriptures.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> night of the retreat, one of the monks went to see the Zen Master. When they had seated themselves comfortably on the floor, the Master smiled and said to the participant: "I like Christianity. But I would not like Christianity without the resurrection." Then he added: "Show me your resurrection. I want to see your resurrection." ("Western Contemplative Spirituality" in the SPIRITUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATOR, page not cited)

That becomes the task of all of us who have wondered into Church this Easter weekend. To show the world the resurrection.

When I was in Chapel Hill at St. Thomas More Parish, I dealt with a number of mostly grad students. One day a young man asked me for an appointment. After he sat down in my office, I said, "So, tell me about yourself."

"Well, I was a teenager from hell, made my parents' lives miserable," he began.

"I hear that a lot around here. Nothing special in that," I said.

"I was so bad they had me committed to a mental institution for teenagers," he continued.

"Can you do that?" I asked.

"I broke out of that place, hitchhiked to Chicago, where I lived on the streets as a prostitute. One night I rolled this guy, a businessman from out of town, took his wallet, and went on a spree with his credit cards until the police got me and I was sent to Joliet for 3 years."

"Wow. I thought you meant that you did some stuff with cheerleaders in high school," I responded.

"I told you I was bad. Don't know if you have ever been in a prison like that, but it was hell. I hit bottom. This older prisoner took me under his wing; he read to me from the Bible at night before lockdown. He was the worst reader. Took him forever to get through a chapter. So, one night he was reading from the Gospel of Luke, I think. It was that section about the lost sheep, lost coin, and the prodigal son. And it was just like Jesus Himself walked into that cell and grabbed me, slammed me against the wall, and said to me, 'I got plans for you, kid. Now cut this stuff out!' (He actually said another word that I can't say in church)

"Wow. I don't hear stories like yours very often."

"So, I got my high school degree, got out of Joliet, went to Michigan State and made straight A's, but I always wanted to go to Carolina. So I came here for grad school, and I'm doing great with my grades."

"Wow. So what can I do for you?" I asked.

"Nothing. You're a preacher, right? And I bet you are always looking around for good stories to use in your sermons. We've got Easter coming up. Can't be easy to preach the Resurrection in a place like Chapel Hill. *I am your proof Easter is true.*" (adapted from Will Willimon, *STORIES BY WILLIMON*, p. 185-186)

Third, a more modest story of resurrection. A mother writes: My daughter kept calling. She'd say: "Mother, you must come see the daffodils before they are over." I wanted to go, but it was a 2-hour drive from Laguna to Lake Arrow-head. I'm not old, at least not old, old, but I don't particularly enjoy driving. Everyone is so rude and pushy these days. And in a hurry.

"I'll come next Tuesday," I promised a little reluctantly on her third call.

Next Tuesday dawned cold and rainy. Still, I had promised, and so I drove over to my daughter's. I walked into Carolyn's house and hugged my grandchildren: "Forget the daffodils, Carolyn!" I said, almost with relief. "The road is invisible in the clouds and fog, and there is nothing in the world that I would rather see than you and these children."

My daughter smiled calmly and with a touch of condescension and said, "We drive in this all the time, Mother."

"Well, you won't get me back on the road until it clears and then I'm heading for home!" I assured her.

"I was hoping you'd take me over to the garage to pick up my car." She wasn't listening to me. "How far will I have to drive?" I asked.

"Just a few blocks." Carolyn said, "I'll drive."

We got into the car and drove off. After several minutes, it became apparent that something was afoot. "Where are we going? This isn't the way to the garage!"

"We're going to the garage the long way," Carolyn smiled, "by way of the daffodils."

“Carolyn,” I said sternly, as though she were 3 years old and was about to misbehave – which she was, “Please turn around.”

“It’s all right, Mother, I promise. You will never forgive yourself if you miss this experience.”

After about 20 minutes, we turned onto a small gravel road and I saw a small church. On the far side of the church, there was a hand-lettered sign that read “Daffodil Garden.” We got out of the car and we each took a child’s hand, and I followed Carolyn down the path. Then we turned a corner, and I looked up and gasped. Before me lay the most glorious sight. It looked as though someone had taken a great vat of gold and poured it down over the mountain peak and slopes. The flowers were planted in majestic, swirling patterns – great ribbons and swaths of deep orange, white, lemon yellow, salmon pink, saffron and butter yellow. Each different-colored variety was planted as a group so that it swirled and flowed like its own river with its own unique hue. There were 5 acres of flowers.

“But who has done this?” I asked.

“It’s just one woman,” Carolyn answered. “She lives on the property. That’s her home.” Carolyn pointed to a well-kept A-frame house that looked small and modest in the midst of all that glory. We walked over to the house. On the patio we saw a poster.

“Answers to the Questions I Know you are Asking” was the headline. The first answer was a simple one: “50,000 bulbs,” it read. The second answer was, “One at a time, by one woman. Two hands, two feet and very little brain.” The third answer was, “Began in 1958.”

There it was. *The Daffodil Principle*. For me, that moment was a life-changing experience. I thought of this woman whom I had never met, who more than 60 years ago, had begun – one bulb at a time – to bring a vision of beauty and joy to an obscure mountaintop. Still, just planting one bulb at a time, year after year, had changed the world. This unknown woman had forever changed the world in which she lived. She had created something of ineffable magnificence, beauty, and inspiration.

The principle her daffodil garden taught is one of the greatest principles of life.

That is, learning to move toward our goals and desires one step at a time – and learning to love the doing, learning to use the accumulation of time. When we multiply tiny pieces of time with small increments of daily effort, we, too, will find we can accomplish magnificent things. We can change the world

“It makes me sad in a way,” I admitted to Carolyn. “What might I have accomplished if I had thought of a wonderful goal 30 or 40 years ago and had worked away at it ‘one bulb at a time’ though all these years? Just think what I might have been able to achieve!” My daughter summed up the message of the day in her usual direct way.

“Start tomorrow,” she said.

“I’ll start today,” I said.

The Daffodil Principle of this story is a good one: *Start today – one step at a time – to change your world.*

This principle emerges, however, from the character and performance of the old lady herself who planted the daffodils. It might better be called “The Old Lady Principle.”

But if we focus on the DAFFODIL, another, radically different principle emerges: IT IS IN DYING THAT WE GAIN LIFE. Or, after every crucifixion, there's a resurrection. Or, in losing our life, we truly find it. (story from HOMILETICS, Sept-Oct 2002, p. 42-43) Have a Blessed Easter.

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HE IS RISEN AS HE SAID! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!

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