



Easter Isn't Over

TEXT
Mark 16:1-8
2 Corinthians 4:7-12

March 27, 2016 — Easter — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

Imagine there was conversation with the other disciples about going along, but as it turns out, the women were the only ones to come to the tomb. Their grief was strong. But they were more than sad.

They had not been who they wanted to be this week. Judas had betrayed him. Peter had denied him. All of the disciples had abandoned him. After all that Jesus had done for them, when he needed them, they fled. And there was nothing they could do to fix that.

Do you know that circumstance: when there is something in your life that has gone wrong, and you can't fix it? It happens in work sometimes. It happens in relationships sometimes — even relationships we care about the most. Sometimes things just go wrong, and we can't make them right.

I have learned something about myself. I have a propensity to mess things up.

Frances Spufford says it this way: "Wherever the line is drawn between good and evil, between acceptable and unacceptable, between kind and cruel, ... we're always going to be [walking] on both sides of [that line.]"¹ And not just by

accident. As Spufford says, "It's our active inclination to break stuff, including moods, promises, relationships we care about and our own well-being."²

And sometimes we can't make it right.

I was in elementary school, and my friend Danny and I were riding our bikes — one speeds with banana seats. We would clip playing cards in the spokes to make a sound "just like a motorcycle." And we would ride all over the neighborhood. At the far end of the schoolyard, there was a creek; and a bridge that crossed the creek would take you into another neighborhood. I was told clearly more than once, "Don't cross the bridge." That was the rule.

Well, I didn't mean to cross the bridge. It just happened. Just over the bridge was a new grocery store being built, and they had laid the new pavement for the parking lot. There were sawhorses in the entrance to keep cars out — which left this wide-open space for us to ride.

It wasn't until we were on our way home that we noticed our tires had pulled up bits of pavement, not fully dried and flung up on our bikes and the

backs of our shirts. Some was in my hair. We were covered in parking lot. And you know, you can't just wipe that stuff off.

I got home, and my dad asked, "What's all over you?" I was caught — not escaping.

"What's all over you?"

"Parking lot."

"Did you go over the bridge?" I had disobeyed, and I couldn't hide it; I couldn't fix it. My "sin" was upon me! When we have messed it up, and it can't be fixed, it can be painful.

I was meeting with a young woman preparing for her wedding. She was excited. I asked what I thought was an innocent question. I asked, "Will your father be walking you down the aisle?" She began to cry. I could tell it caught her by surprise.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't expect this. My father won't be at the wedding."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Well, he wasn't at my 16th birthday party. He said he would be at graduation, but evidently something else came up. When I had surgery on my back, the waiting room was empty. The truth is, he hasn't been part of my life for 12 years now. He won't be there."

“Have you asked him?” I said. As soon as I asked, I wished I hadn’t. It seemed insensitive.

“No. I know what he will say. If I have learned anything, it is that I can’t fix this.”

When life has gone wrong, and there is no repair, it’s a terrible place to be.

The early morning journey to the tomb must have included some shame amidst the sadness. His followers had not been who they wanted to be.

The women carried spices. Carrying the spices may have helped. If you have known grief, you know the odd comfort it can be to have something to do. “Busy” is your friend. It was their last act of love: spices for his broken and breathless body.

There at the tomb, they saw the angel. Don’t think “halo and wings and clothes that look like they run on batteries.” An angel is just a holy messenger. You have probably had a few angels in your life — someone who brings a message from God. If you are like me, we almost always recognize them as angels after the fact.

The holy messenger said, “He has been raised.” There are two things about his message. Resurrection is not our work. Death is the ultimate wrong that we cannot fix and cannot change.

There is no explanation of Easter, except to say that this is what the love of God looks like in the face of death. Resurrection is something God does. God refuses to grant death the power to pull us from God.

So in the hospice house and in the Brussels airport, God is there, pushing back the power of death.

In hospital rooms and hospital beds placed in familiar dens or living rooms, and in Paris or San Bernardino when blood is spilled and breath is gone, God does what only God can do.

After gun shots rang out in the Emmanuel Church in Charleston, South Carolina, or chilly waters consume the youngest refugees from Syria, God is there.

The resurrection of Jesus means that death does not win. But resurrection means more than that. God takes that which we cannot make right, and God redeems.

Jesus was love, and the hard thing to face is how offensive we found that love to be. When the world tried to shut him up, tried to push him away, he wouldn’t leave us. Jesus comes back. He comes back to us.

We have an excellent preschool downstairs. And at the Meneilly Center, we have our Village Child and Family Development Center. At each of these places, moms and dads drop off the treasure of their hearts with teachers. And the litany is the same: “I’ll be back,” they say. The hallways in September can be filled with weeping and gnashing of teeth as little ones are abandoned by their parents. “Don’t cry. I’ll be back.”

“Now you stay here with Ms. Rosemary. I’ll be back.”

Sure enough, by the end of the day, mom has come back, just like she promised. We actually have a very high percentage of parents who return for their children. They can’t help it; that’s what love does. Love can’t stay away.

Then the strangest thing happens. Twelve years pass, and these precious children grow up and get a driver’s license. Then the same lesson has to be taught again. “Remember your curfew time.”

“I will, Dad.”

“12:15 is not the same as 12:00. Don’t be late.”

“Daaaad! I know, I know.” That’s teenager language for, “I’ll be back. Don’t worry, I’ll come back. You don’t have to cry; I’ll be back.” That’s what love does.

That’s the best way I know to talk about Easter. Easter is the love of God come back to us. Even when we try to push Jesus away, he comes back. It’s what love does.

But there is more. The resurrection of Jesus Christ means there is life after death. But resurrection means more than that. Resurrection means that the way of Jesus is true. It means that to live like Jesus is to be fully human. It means that sins are forgiven and life is made whole.

But if that is true, then there is no doubt that Easter isn’t over. It’s not complete. The angel says he is not here. “He has gone ahead of you to Galilee.”

Of course he has! We need to understand this. The angel

is not giving the women an address to meet Jesus. It's not that Jesus has retired to a nice coffee shop where he can catch up with his disciples. Galilee is the place of ministry. Galilee is where Jesus taught and where he pushed back evil. It is where he healed that which was broken and where he forgave that which we cannot fix.

Why is this important? Because that is where we see the love of God alive in this world. Resurrection is not just about life after we die; resurrection is the battle God wages to repair and heal and redeem that which we cannot make right in this world.

She looked at me and said, "I'm sorry. I'm crying again." It was her wedding day, and standing in the sanctuary was the man who would promise to love her in plenty and want, in joy and sorrow, in sickness and in health.

Standing next to her was another man who, truth be told, gave her every reason to believe she didn't matter to him at all. But he was there — for the first time in a long time, he was there. I was glad he chose to come; but I was more impressed by her.

She could have let her anger control her. She could have let her injury define all that he could be, because neither of them could fix all that had gone wrong. But she risked it one more time.

"Daddy, I want you to be there. I need you to be there."

And he was there. Now I can't tell you that everything

was all better after that. You know these matters are more complex than that. But it was a sign of grace. It was a moment when God brought life from that which seemed dead.

Sometimes God does what only God can do and brings new life from death. I think there are signs of God's love showing up among us.

As Paul says, "We have this treasure in clay jars. This power is from God, not of our own, which is why we are afflicted, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; struck down, but not destroyed."

Easter isn't over. For the love of God has come back to us. And God's love is set loose in this world. So look for it. The love of God will show up in your life; look for it.

¹Frances Spufford, *Unapologetic* (2012), p. 33

²*Ibid.*, p. 27

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's Web site: www.villagepres.org/sermons.