

This may surprise you, but I consider my Easter sermon the most difficult one to prepare. I always wonder what people come needing to hear. You may think that I should be starting with the message God wants to give, but there are many resurrection messages God has for us, so I start by thinking about which one of those messages the congregation is needing to hear this year. And after careful consideration, I decided that we needed to hear the message of “resurrection joy!”

We’ve been through almost a decade of really tough stuff both in our world and in our church. As a pastor I’m privileged and honored to be called upon at times of crisis and grief. There have been many little crosses placed along the highways of our lives’ journeys, like those small white crosses with flowers we see on the roadside, placed there by family and friends marking the deaths of loved ones.

But today I invite us to move from sorrow to “resurrection joy!” I believe that in spite of all that is life-denying, God longs for us to live in joy. But if perhaps you need a more serious, theological address of the Easter message, and if my words don’t speak to your heart, well ... you can always go to our website and read other Easter sermons from the archives.

Some months ago the Spirit had the good sense to let me know that today we needed to see Melissa dance because when she dances, my soul is resurrected right up to the heavens! Song and dance and *her* spirit speak to me of resurrection joy in a way that transcends words!

And this past month as I waited at church for electricians to come install free light bulbs so we could save money and energy, I’ve had plenty of time to listen to Jim’s music, and again the Spirit seemed to say that we needed to hear “Has It Dawned” on this particular Easter day.

Then, last Sunday afternoon, I began reading Anne Lamott’s book *Grace, (Eventually)*. Normally I’m a very slow reader but her books carry me away and I am able to transcend my reading difficulties as I get buried in her wonderful stories of faith.

Now I’m not recommending her writing to those who get offended by bad words or details of her earlier life of sex and drugs (which she often contrasts with her present day life of faith), but for me, she inspires. As I read, I did receive whispers of Easter themes. She quoted her pastor as saying, “Easter means that you can put the truth in a grave, but you can’t keep it there.” That’s pretty good, I thought.

By Tuesday I remembered some banners that Babs Davis gave us when she and Walt were downsizing their home. Babs made them herself. I knew they would come in handy one day. And so I rolled them out. They are banners of resurrection joy! The first one is hanging on my right: *“Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when dawn is still dark.”*

Later on Tuesday, baby Chloe sat on my lap and sent her first e-mail to Grandpa Steve. It looked like this:

Sounds goo g=g--chloe is he5l5ping me typa. Hns ,,,,,,,,,, , j//////////

That’s one for the baby book! This spoke to me of joy!

I began to look for examples of resurrection joy; the joy that springs out of things that look dead. I remembered the big sequoia trees in Yosemite that I wanted to see ever since I studied them in my 4th grade science class in Topeka, Kansas. Finally, in 2001 I saw them for the

first time. Even within the trees that had died and fallen over, I could see small seedlings sprouting and growing.

The other night I learned on PBS that the heat of the great Australian fires were necessary for the pods holding seeds to open and release the possibilities for a resurrected forest. ***“In the bulb there is indeed a flower.”***

Finally, on Wednesday morning, Tom brought me *The Christian Century* along with my morning coffee. In it was an article by Barbara Brown Taylor titled: “And Jesus sang”.

This is how she begins: ***“After all this time I thought I knew Jesus really well. Then just last week--preparing to preach at a congregational celebration of word and music--I discovered something unsettling about him. If my concordance is telling the truth, then he never played an instrument, never led his followers in song, never hummed a refrain or sang himself to sleep. After all these years, this is like learning that he never skipped a stone on water or warmed his hands at a fire. How is it possible to be fully human without ever making music?”***

Then she describes her searching the concordance using the word *hymn*. She writes: ***“According to both Matthew and Mark, it is possible that Jesus sang at least once. On the first night of Passover, after he had shared his last supper with his friends, they did one last thing together before they headed out into the night.***

“When they had sung the hymn, both evangelists say, ‘they went out to the Mount of Olives’”. She then confirmed with a rabbi that very likely they sang together the Hallel--Psalms 113 through 118--sung during evening prayers on the first night of Passover from Jesus’ day to our own. And so she concludes: ***“Jesus may only have sung once, but when he did, the Word Made Flesh became Music as well.”***

The second banner Babs gave us is on my left and says: ***“He came singing love, he lived singing love, he died singing love, he rose in silence; if his song is to continue, we must do the singing.”***

Whether or not Jesus literally sang as a rabbi cantor would have sung, his life was a song; the incarnation is announced through the song of “the Magnificat.” To the people who hung on his every word, his life must have been the exuberance of Melissa’s dance, the voice of Jim’s “Has It Dawned”, and the songbird that feels light just before dawn. Christ was and is “the music of our hearts.”

Today is a day of joy because in Christ we come to know deep in our souls that the death we fear the most has no ultimate hold on our lives. We no longer have to live our lives just “staying alive;” we need not fear the kingdoms of this world because truth and love are stronger than death.

We hear and see people in Africa and the middle East who fear living lives of compromise and desperation more than they fear death. ***“Truth can be put in a grave, but it will not stay there.”***

We no longer must live fearing spiritual or physical death, because we believe that ***“in every end is a beginning”***. We believe that the ground of all that is *is* a God of love who we see in Christ who ***“came singing love.”***

And so we sing and dance and live with joyful alleluia’s because ***“if the joy of his love song is to continue, we must do the singing.”***