

THE RISING
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March 27, 2016
Easter Sunday
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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Isaiah 65:17-25

I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered; be glad and rejoice forever. No more shall the sound of weeping be heard or the cry of distress. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, says the LORD.

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In case you hadn't heard or noticed, you can't get from Palm Sunday to Easter without going through Good Friday. Which brings us to Brussels.

Early Tuesday morning bombs exploded in Brussels and weeks before that in Paris and before that in Beirut and before that in Baghdad and before that in Nairobi and before that in Hiroshima, Pearl Harbor, London, Jerusalem, and before that...where shall I stop?

Which raises the question: Who started this reign of terror?

And who nailed Jesus to the cross? And who hung all those black bodies from trees in Mississippi and Alabama not so long ago?

Who started this cycle of violence and when will it stop?

And that brings us to the gospel lesson for today.

On the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women came to the tomb, with their spices. They found the stone rolled away, but when they went in, they did not find the body. And a voice said: why do you seek the living among the dead. The One you seek is risen. (Luke 24:1-12)

Did you hear that? *They did not find the body.* That sounds like the beginning of a great mystery novel. As we often say: *Great is the mystery of faith.*

You can't get to Easter without Good Friday. First comes the crucifixion. Then comes the Resurrection. First come the nails. Then come the wings. First comes the dying. Then comes the rising.

If you came here today feeling nailed to the wall, if you came here feeling good as dead, if you came here feeling lost in a cavern of despair, this day is for you.

Listen up. The rising has begun.

On a certain Tuesday morning in September 15 years ago, the Twin Towers exploded into flames. New York City fire fighters rushed in and up a mountain of stairs like Jesus lugging his cross up mount Calvary to save the world from a fiery hell of fear, hatred and endless retaliation.

Who started this and when will it stop? Will we ever rise above these flames of hatred and fear?

The fire fighters rushed in. And The Boss, Bruce Springsteen put it into a song, "The Rising," a song that echoes Good Friday and Easter.

*I can't see nothin' in front of me
Can't see nothin' behind*

*I make my way through this darkness
can't feel nothing but this chain that binds me*

*Lost track of how far I've gone
how high I've climbed
On my back's a sixty pound stone
On my shoulder a half mile line*

*Come on up for the rising
Come on up, lay your hand in mine
Come on up for the rising
Come on up for the rising tonight*

And what might that “rising” be?

Perhaps it's the rising of souls winging their way to heaven through a fiery silo. Lay your hand in mine. *Today you shall be with me in Paradise.*

First the nails. Then the wings.

That's one kind of rising, rising out of this world into another, into the eternal light of love. Many see that rising in the Resurrection story. And there's nothing wrong with that. When I was a child, that's what I saw. That's all I saw.

But there's something else to be seen in the Resurrection story. Not the rising of a single body or the rising of many singular bodies into another world but rather the rising of a new thing on earth, the way it's always been with evolution, something new and a little surprising rising out of the old, a new species as it were, known by many names and none at all. It's what we might call “the Body of Christ,” the Beloved Community, a new species comprised not of cells but of re-born people.

It's a world wide Body of Compassion transformed by suffering, rising above divisive barriers, rising above violent hatred, rising above tribal fears, rising above deeply ingrained instincts for revenge and retaliation. It's a new creation still unfolding, in fits and starts, here, there and everywhere.

Come on up for the rising. Come on up, lay your hand in mine.

But will we?

We have a choice. Get even. Or get over it—*somehow.*

We have a choice.

Out of the fire of every Good Friday, we can transmit more pain, more suffering, more torture, more hatred and more fear into this world. We can build more walls.

Or, we can let pain and suffering transform us. We can build bridges. *Abba, Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing.* And we must forgive as well for—as it turns out—*no one really knows what they're doing.*

And that brings us to verse two of “The Rising.”

*I left the house this morning
Bells ringing filled the air
I left the house this morning
Wearin' the cross of my calling
On wheels of fire I come rollin' down*

I don't know but I can guess many of you leave the house every morning "wearing the cross of your calling." And that's a good thing. For every day a bell's ringing. Every day a voice is crying. Every day a hand is reaching out. Come on up, come on up. Christ has risen, Christ is risen, Christ is rising.

Come on up for the rising, lay your hand in mine.