

Easter Year A 2020

So let's go back in time.... Not 2000 years... but about 63-ish. I was standing in my grandmother's garden among her prize camellias around ten O'clock in the morning when Fred Johnson, the local funeral director, approached me with a whisper, and asked if I would like to tell my grandfather good-bye. My grandfather was lying in state in the parlor of the rambling old house on Cherokee Ave., a great house for hide and seek... but this was not one of those days. Fred Johnson was tall and thin, somewhat lost in his clothes. He had an angular, expressionless face. His smile seemed overly rehearsed. His teeth were slightly stained with nicotine. If you looked up undertaker in the dictionary... his picture would surely be there. I walked with him to the parlor, my hand in his strangely soft hand, and there was granddaddy stretched out in the casket... someone in the room said he looked good.... He didn't of course...He was dead. I was seven years old.

I remember not being afraid, and I remember being not sad, but disappointed. He was not there... there was no one to say good-by to... all that was there was a body run its course... mundane, simple really; for as long as I had known him he had struggled to breathe, now he wasn't breathing at all. It seemed, well, absurd. Over the years I've thought of that absurdity, that perhaps this is all there is: Just the battered wreckage of life left behind by a receding tide; our bodies at last, fossils only of lost hope. That night I remember my father weeping sitting on the edge of his bed. Was he weeping for his

father whom he never liked much, or was he weeping over the grand possibility that the last word, the grand finale of our existence, of the world's existence, is a decaying corpse among indifferent whispers, and casseroles, and slices of pound cake. I'd never seen him cry before, nor would I ever see him cry again... "O woman, why are you weeping?"

Throughout human existence we have been too much among the dust and ashes, the broken artifacts of hope and expectations, too much among the dead; looking for one more word... one more word beyond the corpse... one more word to brace against our ruin... we have been too much among the several deaths in life... the ennui, the addiction, the failed marriage... financial stress...the dread disease... disappointments of our pining hearts... and too much among the deathly evils of our world: violence and hunger and disease and injustice and the indignities that ossify into despair... relics of the heart's hardness.... Are these words, for God's sake, the last word?

"O woman why are you weeping?" In a poignant moment, a moment of shattering recognition in John's Gospel, Mary Magdalene hears a word... a word so powerful that the world will never be the same... it comes as gentle as a breeze, and as bold as lightning... a word not really in any language... but a word to be sure... she'd heard it before sometime, perhaps... maybe the word was hidden in the stranger's voice, breaking the silence, just outside the tomb... but a word to be sure... a word from beyond the pale of death... a word that bears witness to the eternal, irrepressible life force that has and does overcome death and the grave; ...and forever shall.... Perhaps

she heard it in Jesus speaking her name, Mary.... O don't ask me what the word is.... But seek it among the graves of our world... seek it where there is despair and pain and injustice... seek it in the hour of our own deaths... seek it in the need of our brothers and sisters who sojourn with us in this life... because it will come to us as graceful as the dawn of a new day... it will come as lithe as a breeze among the live-oaks.... It will come as Joy... it will come as renewed Hope and it will come as the Courage of possibility... in spite of the unwieldy corpse in our midst... it will come... and we won't be afraid and we won't be disappointed.

We know this to be true, don't we? Deep down it is a matter of recognition... recognizing what we already know to be true; a deep truth from the foundation of time, a pattern as to the way God is.... We have known the joy that quickens in our soul on the heels of tragedy... we have known the power of being forgiven... we see just beyond our very doors, the resurrection of our world in every act of mercy and justice, and Love.... It is the pattern, the coherence of creation, that death yields to life and Love.... And, we have known the courage it takes to be human... all this we know.... And this quickening life, come round again, for which we gather to proclaim this day is ours to bear.... We, the people of this word know that death is not the end, the finale... we know that life finds a way.... Love finds a way...that death is overcome... that life and love find a way.... That love is so reliably strong.... This we know, and this we proclaim.

The resurrection of Jesus, dear people of God, is our mythology, capital M, that is to say, the truth of who we are.... People called out of our tombs to bear life to the

world.... Know well that Christ is raised from the dead in every act of justice.... Christ is raised from the dead in every act of kindness.... Know well that Christ is raised in every act of compassion... in every act of mercy.... And in every act of sacrifice the stone is rolled away from the tomb and death trembles.... Christ is risen, and we my brothers and sisters are also risen indeed.... Death is not the end... because life begins yet again this day, and life and love will always begin again... and that dear people of the faith is cause for joy and cause for an invincible hope... the word is in truth, the last word... why then should we weep? ...why then should we weep?