

Acts 10:34-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

1 Corinthians 15:19-26
John 20:1-18

Today, we celebrate the central event of the Christian faith, Easter, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the promise that we too will be resurrected. The resurrection is more than a future event. The resurrection gives us a newness of life today.

It was just another day. Jesus had died, but at first it concerned only a very small group of people. Besides, death was always around and in people's faces. Many of us never see death. They did not hide death back then like we do today. They died in their homes with their children and grandchildren and great grandchildren around. Today we die in a hospital or a nursing home or a hospice unit, often times by ourselves. We try to hide it from our children. We disguise the reality of death by embalming the body and covering death with makeup to make it look like they are just sleeping. We place their body in a beautiful piece of furniture. But in ancient society, death was everywhere. Even though their friend, their master, Jesus had died, it was just another death. We don't know why Mary Magdalene went to Jesus' tomb. Maybe for the same reason we may visit a loved one at their grave. Mary was not expecting anything different or new. She was not looking for anything in particular. She probably had seen death many times. Nothing was different.

And yet, something was different. The stone to the tomb was rolled away. She ran back to report to Peter and the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, that someone had taken Jesus' body. Not that Jesus was resurrected, but someone had taken Jesus' body. She did not fathom a resurrection because dead people stay dead. A young boy whose family was in the funeral business heard the story of Jesus' resurrection for the

first time. When he questioned the Sunday School teacher about it, and affirmed that Jesus came back to life, the boy responded, "That would not have happened if my dad had him." After the two disciples left, Mary Magdalene stayed at the tomb. When Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, she did not recognize it was Jesus. She thought he was a gardener. It was not until Jesus said her name that Mary recognized her. Why had Mary not recognized Jesus? Perhaps the reason why was the old paradigm that dead people don't come back to life, and so this prevented her from recognizing that it was Jesus. Jesus was dead. This guy wasn't.

Remember the story of Thomas. Jesus had appeared to the disciples, but Thomas was not present; he did not see the risen Lord. When the disciples later saw Thomas, they exclaimed that they had seen the risen Lord. Thomas was not going to believe it until he saw for himself. Dead people don't come back to life! Even though Jesus had been telling them that he would die and rise from the dead, the disciples did not understand, did not understand because when you die, you're dead. This resurrection, this was something new.

Perhaps we are like Mary Magdalene. We go through every day without any expectations that it will be different. It is just another day. We get up in the morning. Eat breakfast. Read the morning paper. We shower. Pack our lunch. Jump in the same car and drive the same route to work. It is the same routine every morning we can do it in our sleep, and I am sure most of us wish we could do it in our sleep. We might even park in the same spot every day. We go to our place of work, and we do the same thing day after day. Life is just one darn thing after another, the same thing day after day after day. I took a tour of a General Electric plant that made analog clocks for their

appliances. At one station, a man took two identical pieces, laid them on some kind of plate, and then pushed two separate buttons with both hands, which stamped those pieces on the plate. The reason he had to push two buttons with both hands was to prevent him from injuring his hand if it would be under the machine. After those pieces were stamped, he put that plate in a box and did it again! It only took a few seconds to stamp each plate. Every few seconds stamping the same two pieces on the same plate eight hours a day, five days a week. At the end of the day, we drive back home, eat dinner, get some errands done around the house and tomorrow we do it again! Even the weekends can be the same, household chores, yard work, and errands. And if we have children at home, we do more of the same everyday. Talk about a rut. Life is the same darn thing over and over and over again. It is one darn thing after another.

It reminds me of the movie *Groundhog Day*. Phil Connors, played by Bill Murray, is a Pittsburgh TV weather man who, during an assignment covering the annual Groundhog event in Pennsylvania, finds himself in a time loop, repeating the same day again and again. Each morning he wakes up, it is Groundhog Day again. When we get up in the mornings, we may feel like it is the same day, again! Same song, second verse. At the peak of her fortune and fame, with 146 tennis championships behind her and married to John Lloyd, Chris Evert reflected, "We get into a rut. We play tennis, we go to a movie, we watch TV, but I keep saying, 'John there has to be more.'" The author of Ecclesiastes wrote, "There is nothing new under the sun."

And yet, on this day there is something new! On this day, Mary Magdalene witnesses something new! On this day, there is something different! A dead man comes back to life. Our reading from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is from the fifteenth

chapter, the entire chapter being about this new thing, the resurrection. The Corinthians had their doubts. We too may have our doubts. As one theologian declared, doubt is not the opposite of faith, it is a part of faith. Paul declares to them, "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied." This is Paul's way of saying that our belief in the resurrection gives new life. Death does not have the last word! Again, from our Corinthians reading, Paul declares, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." This changes everything! The resurrection is not just eternal life, but it is what gives meaning to this life. The resurrection is not just pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die, it is having pie alamode now!

Atul Gawande, in his book *Being Mortal* tells the story of a physician named Bill Thomas who wanted to remake a nursing home. He was not only a doctor, he was a farmer. Gawande writes of Thomas, "From the first day on the job, he felt the stark contrast between the giddy, thriving abundance of life that he experienced on his farm and the confined, institutionalized absence of life that he encountered every time he went to work." Thomas decided that the answer was "to put some life into the nursing home the way he had done in his own home - by literally putting life into it." He managed to get a grant to bring dogs, cats and 100 birds into the nursing home. He encouraged staff to bring their children to work. They planted a garden, built a playground and started an onsite childcare center.

The result? "People who we had believed weren't able to speak started speaking," Thomas said. "People who had been completely withdrawn and nonambulatory started coming to the nurses' station and saying, 'I will take the dog for a

walk." Gawande notes, "The lights turned back on in people's eyes." These people had experienced a newness of life. We too can experience that newness.

Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honor
and power and might be to our God
forever and ever. Amen.