

April 4, 2010, Easter Sunday  
Luke 23:54 – 24:12  
First Parish UCC, Brunswick  
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## On the Other Side of Easter

The Word is...

Jesus is on the *loose*.

Wait a minute. They laid his lifeless body in the tomb.

But, the tomb is empty.

Jesus *is* on the loose.

We're getting a bit ahead of ourselves. On the other side of Easter, the earlier side, in the time after the cross but before the first day of the week, there were sobs of anguish and tears of grief. The women had gone to see where the body was laid. They prepared spices and ointments to anoint the body. And of course there was the obituary to write, for the Jerusalem Times, though undoubtedly the editors wouldn't print it.

What to write about Jesus? How do you put all someone has meant to you in just a few words.

Maybe they should say

Jesus had already been on the loose.

Even though the disciples, at times, tried to slow him down and keep him to themselves,

Jesus was a free spirit.

Even though the authorities disapproved of his table gatherings with riff raff,

Jesus was a free loving spirit.

He was healing and teaching; remembering and reforming his tradition, distilling discipleship to the core values of loving God and loving neighbor, with the radical twist that we are to love even our enemies.

God had set Jesus loose in the world.

But then, Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem, the center of religious and political authorities. It was the Passover holiday and tens of thousands of pilgrims were making their way to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. The disciples didn't want to go. They suggested that maybe they shouldn't go this year. There had been rumors and threats. But, Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem.

The disciples were right to be nervous. The temple authorities were outraged at Jesus' challenges to their teachings and traditions. The civil authorities, the Roman occupiers, were always as skittish as a cat on a hot tin roof during Passover. They were concerned about how to keep control of the crowds. They would clamp down on the smallest disturbance to prevent any

uprising. And here comes Jesus, to whom the people were shouting Hosanna, meaning save us. There was even some rumblings, calling him King of the Jews. Who was this guy anyway?

Along the way, in the midst of the cheers and affirmations, Jesus had experienced a spit here, a rock here, some nasty jeers. But how did it ever come to this? How did it all unravel so fast?

Bullying often starts small – a little shove here, a nasty glance there, some hateful words and hurtful emails. Then someone gets really hurt.

In our public, political discourse lately the tone has been tense, taunting, and troubling. There has been spitting, racial slurs, bricks thrown, bombs threatened, and taunting from all sides.

It is into just such a world as this that Jesus came. It is in just such a world as ours that things got out of hand, the anger escalated, fear raged and before you knew it someone was dead – that someone was Jesus.

So the women did what women have done for centuries; they prepared to honor the body of their loved one. But, when they came to the tomb on the first day of the week, instead of finding a body they received a word, “He is risen.” In the twinkling of an eye, the mystery of the resurrection unfolded before them. The tomb was empty. Their hearts began to flutter and their bodies to take wing. They were filled with something they thought they had lost forever – hope.

As Emily Dickinson put it,

Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul  
It sings the tune –without the words  
And never stops at all.

While the authorities had said No to Jesus, God responded with a might YES.  
While the cross counts on our cynical acceptance of the ways of the world, the empty tomb reveals Love as the way of the Word. Christ is on the loose.

That first Easter is the fulcrum of the Christian witness. On the one side is the healing and teaching ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. On the other side is the ongoing presence of the Risen Christ, and the call to us to be the body of Christ in the world.

As we live on the other side of that first Easter we are called to embody the ministry of Christ. Teresa of Avila, a 16<sup>th</sup> century mystic, wrote,

### *Christ Has No Body*

Christ has no body but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
Compassion on this world,

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,  
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.  
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,  
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.

About fifteen years ago I received a phone call in my office. It was a middle aged man named Jim who told me he had never really participated in church. But he lived in the neighborhood and every time he drove by he sensed a pull to come in. Jim was a deeply spiritual person, but he wasn't sure what to do with religion. However, at this point in his life he was sensing a need to deepen his understanding and his experience of his own tradition. To make a long story shorter, Jim came and got to know us. His baptism was a joyous celebration. In recent years, Jim has been training to be a hospital chaplain.

Jim has a poet's heart. Every now and again he sends a poem. Recently he sent a new Easter poem. It begins with the unexpected image of laying a telephone pole, before the days when machines did all the work.

### Centering Down

They say that in the old days  
Of laying in telephone poles by hand,  
After the hole was dug and pole dropped in,  
It could veer suddenly to one side.  
The younger, less experienced workers, wanted to run  
But the elders, held them back and told them  
To move toward the pole, steadying it with many hands,  
To center it down.

It is the mystery of the Lenten journey  
That we move closer to the cross  
Not because we must, but by invitation of the oldest heart.  
It is here in the fury of the moment  
That we meet the hands of others,  
The nimble fingers of shalom,  
Who do not turn from Love and justice,  
And who in community will stay the truth,  
Seeking the stillness of its peace,

Always at the center,  
On the other side of Easter.

(James Crary, 3/31/10)

As we move into the days ahead  
on the other side of Easter,  
may our hands, together,  
touched by resurrection hope,  
stay the truth,  
not turn from Love and Justice,  
seek the stillness of peace  
as we are centered  
in the Easter proclamation –  
Jesus is on the loose.

May God set us loose, as well.