

“Raised Up to Raise Up Others”
A Easter Sunday; 7:00 & 10:00 am
John 20:1-18, 2017
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

I. THE WEEK THAT WAS

It started last Sunday. With that Palm Parade. That provoking act of praise and public adoration that launched a series of events that led to MORE provocation!

Tables turned over in the Temple. Authorities challenged. Events that turned darker and darker. Denial. Betrayal. Abuse and Torment. And finally: turned over, trial, terror, torture, termination. And, a Tomb.

And we, his followers, along with Peter and James, John and the Gang. Mary Magdalene and Mary his mother, and all the other Marys and Marthas and Salomes and....., who walked through those traumatic days. To the Table, to Gethsemane, Golgotha, and the Garden Tomb.

Here *we* are, today. In the Garden with Mary, yet again.

II. PUZZLED IN THE GARDEN

And we are puzzled, exhausted, rent in two by all we have seen and heart. So puzzled that we don't recognize what is happening in our midst. Don't recognize the Risen One—walking, talking, living, loving *right in front of our eyes!* In front of our ears, and our noses!

For we have seen and heard and known so much over these past few days that we just can't take it all in. We have walked with Jesus all these many weeks—started in the Wilderness way back in First Lent. And, we have known despair, loss, denial, betrayal, trauma and yes—even death! We have been in the tomb ourselves at times.

III. HOLY SATURDAY, JESUS!

Yet, we have come *out* of the tomb and known new life, as well!

Let me tell you about yesterday. In one 24-hour spin of the dial, we in this community have known death and life, Tomb and Resurrection.

2:30 am

Early in the morning, while it was yet still, dark, at 2:30 am, one Saint Flora Elsey passed through the veil and into her resurrection. 90 years young and full of spunk and sass, but also satisfied that she had lived long and well and full of merriment and music.

8:00 am?

While the sun was climbing higher in the sky, the Close family gathered for breakfast and reflection, then returned a Gardener's ashes to the earth. Forever remembered with a fitting horseshoe cross and sprays of colorful flowers much like these flowers in our Cross today.

9:30 am

On toward Noon (Eastern Daylight Time), a child was born! And a new name and role was born too! “Great-grandparent” is a new stage of life for Bill and Arlene Waldorf, thanks to Kaden Dennis Nelson, 7 lbs, 9oz. Healthy boy after a healthy birth following a high-risk pregnancy.

Noonish?

And sometime, in that climb toward noon, in Harpursville, New York, a child was born. A TALL child. After a *very long* pregnancy, watched by millions of people around the world on a webcam!

April the Giraffe *finally* gave birth on Holy Saturday, as approximately 1.25 million people watched. No privacy there. Just a smidge bigger than the Waldorf's 7-pound, 9-ounce bundle of joy. This bundle of legs was about 6 feet tall and makes me think of my baby boy Rocky!

3-5 pm

As the new life celebrations carried on, Clarke's dear Mema Jean hovered a bit in liminal space. Finally able to sleep after a couple days and nights of struggling for air, she had her only little resurrection of sorts between three and five o'clock pm. She woke up and talked, and we recognized her far more—and she us—than earlier in the afternoon.

I challenged her to “BE the resurrection message” of this Easter, and to give me and her son-in-law sermon material for years to come!

IV. RAISING UP

For that Easter Message, no matter how it gets told, conveyed, celebrated, portrayed in every year and every place, is ultimately about “Being Raised Up.” Whether a loved one is raised to Heaven and a new way of being present with us across the veil, or raised out of a dark place into the light. Whenever we celebrate our new life that begins in God and goes to God. And every holy day in between.

On Easter we celebrate that God raised Jesus up, out of the grave, so that we in turn are raised up, so that we can raise others. “The same power that raised Christ from the dead is living in you!” Romans 8:11.

That raising up happens all around us, all the time. To ourselves, to our loved ones. To friends we haven't met yet.

It might look like this story from a young woman:

My church family was there for me during a family mental health crisis, divorce, single mom of a small boy. They came around me, buoyed me up, helped me to find sure footing so that I could learn to soar.

Or this story from a seminary colleague of mine named Ruthann:

I think our Easter 'brought back to life' story might give get the congregants excited...the phone rang at parsonage sometime after midnight waking the minister (and spouse) from deep sleep. It was the hospital at the state university calling to say they had a kidney that would be a perfect match for my spouse.

It would entail a drive of 1-1/2 hours, then lengthy surgery. If said spouse accepted the kidney, it would mean either this pastor missing Easter worship service or the surgery. What to do? The Pastor called the Moderator and said they would be missing worship and drove hubby to hospital for kidney transplant.

The Congregation was 'over the moon' with excitement, and didn't mind that the pastor missed the church service. Talk about resurrection and new life!! This really did happen as the pastor was me, and the kidney recipient was Arne. Think the congregation figured they had a part of this resurrection story!

It might look like the invitation of a sunbeam and birds that called to another friend of mine who was suffering from deep depression. One day, with God's help in creation, she got up out of her bed and went toward the light, one step at a time, loving the creatures and herself as God loves. And, she was healed.

She reflected on our week past, here in our community: “As I ponder the Easter story tonight, I can't help but think of how many small resurrections we each face. For some of us, these resurrections come in the form of a renewed sense of wonder. For others it may come in the form of new love. For many, it appears as healing in a relationship that held no hope. And for others, it is the stone of sadness that is rolled away.”

Raising up might look like the dream of a man named Scott Kerr in Denver, who wanted to help the homeless. So, he outfitted a truck with six washers and dryers. After a rocky start that might have landed his dream in the tomb for good (the parked truck was hit and severely damaged during a high-speed chase), he has launched the Laundry Truck quite successfully as an outreach to the homeless of Denver.

The new truck has washers and dryers and can connect to water lines as it travels around the city, giving the homeless an opportunity to maintain a sense of dignity and start a new life by having clean clothes. Raised up out of poverty and joblessness.

They hope to outfit a second laundry truck if the first one is successful and have ideas for a shower truck that would also serve the homeless. It's the first laundry truck of its kind!

V. RAISING UP COUNTER MOVE

And finally, raising up might look like the ultimate "counter move." This past week, besides Holy Week, which doesn't get much news coverage, our news was filled to the brim with stories of airlines and disturbing events on airplanes.

And then, this came down the pike:

"Today on Finnair we had a mother on board traveling with four little boys. Two of the boys were just babies. Naturally one cannot travel with two babies on a lap, so we had to solve the dilemma of a missing lap, otherwise it would have been a no go for mom and the kids. Luckily, we had our positioning crew on board and the wonderful pilot Tom took the task of being the extra-lap."

And that, is the picture you've been looking at and wondering what on earth that had to do with Easter and Jesus' Resurrection!

Well, there *was* a guy named Pilate in the passion story. But, this is a different kind of pilot, and a different kind of news story. It didn't make the mainstream, did it?!

But this. *This* exemplifies the message of Easter better than any telling I know. For Easter is God's ultimate Counter Move. God counters the hatred, the corrupted powers and principalities and the all-messed-up values of society by transforming their

torture, death and tomb into new life, new relationships, Resurrection!

And we all, like this pilot, have the power to do that. To commit counter moves! To write a different story of what might happen on a crowded plane. To create a different ending for those fearing they'll never find a job and get off the street. To surround with love, support, and crazy levels of adaptability and flexibility, so that new life might happen in our circles, our churches, our communities.

QUOTE: "Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you." L.R.Knost

VI. YOU RAISE ME UP AND INSPIRE ME TO DO THE SAME!

When I am down and, oh, my soul, so weary;
When troubles come and my heart burdened be;
Then I am still and wait here in the silence,
Until you come and sit awhile with me.

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains;
You raise me up to walk on stormy seas;
I am strong when I am on your shoulders;
You raise me up to more than I can be.

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There is no life - no life without its hunger;
Each restless heart beats so imperfectly;
But when you come and I am filled with wonder,
Sometimes, I think I glimpse eternity.