

## GRAVEYARD SHIFT

In spite of what Jake keeps reminding us about the summer solstice, the time of sunlight is increasing each day. And, that is something to celebrate, because it's been a long winter season. We've been through Lent, and Good Friday, and we are ready for some Good News. We need Good News. We need hope, and we're too jaded to settle for fairy tales and fluff.

The Green and the blooming lilies in the sanctuary prompt us to think about Spring and new life, and that is coming soon.

2,000 years ago, the first day of the week after Jesus' crucifixion, did Not begin with hope and optimism.

The disciples and Jesus' followers had heard Jesus mention about rising after death, but it seems they didn't really believe it.

They obviously had their doubts.

At many points in our journeys of faith, we will doubt.  
There are many aspects of faith that are hard for us to embrace.

Sometimes a difficult experience will cause something we previously embraced without much question to become doubtful.

Doubt was a normal, run of the mill, experience for Jesus' disciples and followers.  
The writer Frederick Beuchner has written that "Doubt is the ants in the pants of faith."

Doubt is what keeps our faith moving and engaged.  
It keeps us from becoming complacent, or from ever reducing our faith and our experience of God to a set of easily understandable propositions.

Ultimately, in matters of Christian faith, we are dealing with mysteries.  
The Apostle Paul called us "stewards of the mysteries."  
And as with most things mysterious, in faith, there will be times when we feel a little uneasy, at least a little unsure, and even more than a little doubtful.  
In this, we are no different than the first followers of Christ.  
Thanks be to God for that!

Luke tells us that at the crack of dawn, the women, who had been followers of Jesus for a long while, went to the tomb with spices.  
They were NOT going with the expectation that they would help freshen up the newly raised Jesus.

They were going to finish preparing his dead body for a proper burial.

As they arrived at the tomb; however, they discovered that the stone has been moved.  
There we perplexed, especially when they saw that Jesus' body was not there.  
They did Not conclude that Jesus had been resurrected.  
They did not celebrate.

As they struggled with their thoughts, Luke tells us two men in brilliant clothes appeared to them.  
And the men mildly rebuked the women with the provocative question, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

The women were looking for Jesus in a place for the dead, but Jesus could not be found with the dead.

Instead Jesus was living--living in a new way. He was resurrected.  
His old body wasn't restored, healed or patched up.  
He wasn't revived. Jesus was resurrected.  
He was alive in a very new and different manner.

Jesus' old body had been killed. His old life had ended.

Some people did a very evil thing because they didn't like the implications of Jesus' message.  
They were afraid of the changes his life and message would inspire, so they killed Jesus.

And note, God doesn't control evil actions. god didn't stop the crucifixion. God creates and brings light and new life.  
Darkness and evil tried to prevail, and that is what killed Jesus.

But, God would not allow the light to remain extinguished. God is a God of righteousness, justice, peace, love and grace, and the resurrection of Jesus is God's AMEN to all those things Jesus taught and lived.

God creates. God Makes NEW things / New life, as the Isaiah text proclaims.  
God changes the conditions. God forms a new reality / a new day.  
Jesus was resurrected, as strange and unlikely as that seems, Jesus was alive in a new and special way.

And, just as those women at the tomb learned, life / God's way is Not found with the dead.

Yet, so often our focus is on what is dead and gone, and we become perplexed when our search in empty tombs does not yield what we are looking for.

Nevertheless, we will keep trying to revive or restore what is broken, and become frustrated and depressed when it doesn't work.

This pursuit is illustrated in a story of two friends from Texas who went Moose hunting every year in northern Saskatchewan.

They would fly in each year on a small plane, stay for a week, and the plane would return to pick them up.

As the pilot was dropping them off, he reminded them, "I'll be back in one week, and we can carry the two of you and one moose."

The two hunters nodded and set out into the woods.

A week later, the pilot brought the plane up to shore, and was annoyed to see the two hunters sitting on shore with two moose carcasses, and big ones, too.

"I told you guys we could carry only one moose."

One hunter replied, "The pilot last year didn't complain about us having two."

So the three men loaded both moose and themselves.

The plane required almost the entire lake before the pilot could pull it into the air, and it barely cleared the trees on the far side.

Not far beyond the edge of the lake, though, the plane clipped a tall spruce tree, causing the plane to crash, scattering pieces of wings and antlers.

When the two Texans came to, one of them asked, "Where are we?"

To which the other wearily answered,

"About 100 yards further than we made it last year."

The way out of a dead end usually is not found in a cemetery.

Yet, too often our thoughts and our choices are from the graveyard of past experiences.

"That's the way we've always done it" is but one example.

Another is tweaking an old method by freshening it up with "New and improved."

Such as, we could put a big neon sign in front of our church and advertise on the radio, too. That way when people are looking for a church, they'll be sure to notice us.

The sad reality is, that most people are no longer looking to churches for the answers.

ummm? I wonder why that is?

And then there is the lamenting. And, moaning about the past is truly dwelling with the dead.

Lamenting sounds like:

"It used to be" ..... or "When I was young." .....or.... "Just think what should have / could have happened."

And, I confess, my thoughts can get stuck on what I used to be able to do.

Well, the truth is I'm not 20 or 30 anymore, and there are things I just can't do that I once did. And, being nostalgic will not solve anything, and it certainly is NOT life giving.

Today, is Sunday--Easter Sunday, and now is where the living can begin.

The Easter message includes the invitation to stop looking in dark graves / to look elsewhere / to hope and to be open to the surprise of God.

Sometimes, ugly, nasty events will form a dead end.

The world may be crumbling down, or....  
Sometimes, nothing seems to work anymore.  
And, sometimes we may come to realize we are in the dark / our lives are no longer  
illuminated.....much like working the graveyard shift.  
Reality, as we know it, may scream out, "You're stuck; there is no way out."

Doubt can be a good thing,.... because it can grant us a moment to pause / to look around,..... and....  
maybe .... with a little angelic intervention,..... we may consider shifting our focus away from the  
graveyard of dread and despair.

God creates.  
God takes what is dead and creates a new life.  
God takes what is old, and makes it new..... in a very different way.  
Moreover, God can leave shame in the past, and give a whole new, fresh life.  
God can even take what is dark, ugly and bad,.... and make it good,... .....IF.... the way of the past is  
buried..... and we focus on God in the new.  
That change of direction can be called repentance,..... or it can be called the **surprise of seeing the  
risen Christ.**

When there is no way out, there is a way / a new way created by God.  
And, it is beyond our understanding.  
God is not finished creating and bringing surprise to life.

We are people of the resurrection. As the apostle Paul put it, "whoever is in Christ is a new creation" (2  
Corinthians 5:17).  
We are new creations living with a confident hope.

So, Let us start today, and every day expecting to be surprised by God, and let us share that hope with  
the world around us.

God is with the living, and let us all join in.

There is a beautiful green garden, and there, and in that place Christ is enjoying the wonders of the day.

That's a good vision.            That's where I want to be, looking away from an empty tomb.

Please stand and together we will say the benediction.