

NO REASON TO FEAR

You may ask yourself..... What is that beautiful house?  
And, you may ask yourself..... Where does that highway go?  
And, you may ask yourself..... Am I right..... am I wrong?  
And, you may tell yourself.... Oh, my God, what have I done?

That is the last verse to the song “Once in a life time” performed by the Talking Heads, nearly 30 years ago.

The end of the song is the repetition of the phrase.... “Same as it ever was, .....same as it ever was.....same as it ever was.

Driving home the message: Nothing changes / it’s the same old pattern we all get trapped in to. Those with power always prevail / there is nothing we can do; it is all hopeless..... The poor will be poor, and the rich get richer..... “Same as it ever ways...same as it ever was..... YET,.....the droning of that plea, in the song, is interrupted near the very end with a quieter voice that states: “Then a Twister comes..... Here comes the twister!”

*[Those of you who know the song, may never have heard those two lines. Go home and listen to the song again.]*

Then a Twister comes..... Here comes the twister!

What does a twister do? It turns everything upside down, and now the title of the song has some meaning – “**Once in a life time.**”

Every now and then, there is a hiccup in the universe, and life as we know it..... is never the same again.

Nevertheless, 2,000 years ago, the crucifixion of Jesus seemed to confirm that nothing really ever changes. ...same as it ever was.

Jesus was a man who sincerely **lived and proclaimed** God’s way of justice, peace, love and grace. He went around helping people, and that includes advocating on behalf of the powerless and exploited. His small, but growing group of followers radiated a real optimism. They had hope in his message that love would prevail, and that God was trustworthy.

Yet, Jesus was calling for change. Jesus was advancing a new order / a new way. He wouldn’t play the game and go along with norm .

He was speaking out on sensitive and political issues, and he was brash enough to confront Jerusalem. \*He was a threat to the Jewish authorities, and they couldn’t risk waiting to see if he was just a flash in the pan or if he would fail.

Remember that aspect – they couldn't wait! They feared the worst; they expected the worst for themselves, so they chose violence to get their way. They sensed that they were getting weaker and that Jesus was getting stronger, so they decided to end Jesus, believing that would end the message. *Killing the leader, usually takes care of things,,,,,, for a while.*

Theirs was a depraved reality base on deficit living.

Jesus was killed and buried as a criminal.

In those days, a typical corpse was properly prepared and visited by grieving loved ones, for a couple of days, before it was buried. The remains of criminals were quickly put in the ground, and with the Sabbath approaching, this was especially true for Jesus.

The Upside down kingdom was dead in a tomb, ....same as it ever was.

Prophets, saints and renaissance leaders tend to die too young.

James Douglass, in his book “JFK and the Unspeakable: why he died and why it matters”, suggests that John Kennedy was becoming a peace advocate, and that is why he was killed. He was bringing change to the old order, and that couldn't be tolerated..... same as it ever was.

It is prudent to go along / to stay the course / to not rattle anyone. The death of Jesus was intended to enforce that understanding – **that fear!**

However, early in the morning of the day after the Sabbath, Sunday, a couple of caring women headed towards the tomb of Jesus to appropriately anoint the body. As they were walking to the tomb, they were wondering how they were going to move the large stone that was covering the tomb.

*Before we proceed with this event, please note that chapter 16 of Mark ends with verse eight. There are translations that include additional verses; however, those verses were added later, and .... they are confusing and they detract from the real message with the such things as handling poisonous snakes and so on, ... So ignore those extra verses if they are in your translation.*

Also, this likely is not your first exposure to Easter. You know how the story turns out, but the two Mary's heading to the tomb did NOT know. And, when they came to the tomb, they saw that the huge stone had been rolled away, and they were very surprised by that.

Even so, they slowly entered the tomb..... expecting silence and a corpse inside.

Instead, there was a young man dressed in white sitting on the right side.

*You have to love Mark. He has these little details, such as the Grass was very green, and in this case, the mystery man is sitting on the right, not on the left..... as if we really care.*

I imagine that this was an Alfred Hitchcock moment – a terror moment.

People in tombs are not supposed to be sitting up and talking.

The man in white tries to comfort and calm them down. He tells them not to be afraid – not to be alarmed..... everything is okay.

He confirms that they are in the right tomb, by correctly identifying Jesus, and then..... before he gives them an important message, he informs them of the impossible: Jesus has been raised from the dead!

\*The Twister has come. Here is the Twister that will rearrange reality:  
Jesus was resurrected! God resurrected Jesus.

God decided NO.... *to same as it ever was*. The universe had a hiccup.

God, intervened and declared YES.... YES to Jesus – Yes to everything about Jesus, his life and his message.

The darkness did Not prevail. The old heavy status quo was turned upside down. The first ended up last!

God said YES.... to Jesus.

God didn't play a trump card. .... NO.... God changed the rules!

The way and message of Jesus is God's way and God's way will prevail!

Peace, justice, love and grace..... is the life of Jesus, that will NOT end.

Now, Listen to the message that the women were given:

“Go tell Jesus’ disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”

Did you catch that: “...and Peter”.... as if to say *especially Peter*.

The new way / God's way is full of Grace.

Peter publically denied Jesus, three times. Obviously, Peter was fraught with regret and shame,..... and for Peter, *Jesus wants to make sure he gets the message*, to Peter Jesus in essence says, “It's okay. I forgive you and want to see you along with everyone else.”

Tell Peter..... tell everyone who has failed in life. Tell everyone with regrets and shame.....

“There is grace!”

The Easter message begins with Forgiveness and hope.

And, there is surprise, too!

Did the two women skip out of the tomb singing songs of praise?

???????????

NO! They ran / they fled out of the tomb in terror and utter shock, and they didn't say a word to anyone because they were full of fear.....

Through out Mark's account, we observe the disciples acting foolishly.... or NOT getting it. This is a creative device Mark uses to get the reader to say to self, "I get it. I would do it right. I wouldn't be full of fear, instead I would tell everyone that God raised Jesus from the dead."

Do we get it? .....Or... are we being silent?  
Fear can do strange things to a person.  
Fear can force a person to run, to be silent..... or to react with violence.

The Jewish leaders were afraid and chose violence.

Following September 11, 2001, 90% of Americans approved of using violence to go after the Taliban and then to invade Iraq.

President Bush even said that "The Enemy" (the terrorists) were getting stronger, and American could not wait, but must attack NOW before it was too late.

In his words was the confession that America – the American way and values would get weaker in time, and the enemy would prevail, unless destroyed soon.

??Do we not believe that good and righteousness prevails... that the true way wins in the end?  
Do we believe that Jesus was right?

Or is evil stronger? Will the terrorists get stronger over time?  
Can we not model justice, peace and grace..... and win their hearts over to that way of being?

Or is that just foolish, idealistic thinking?  
??????????

If evil and greed is stronger, then we better hoard what we have. We better NOT share and help others. We must be strong to fight off the enemy. WE need to build up our military. We dare not proclaim peace and grace because it is a farce..... and..... Jesus died and his message was killed, too.  
.....

And, then the whirlwind happened, and God was in whirlwind.  
The universe was turned upside down..... or I should say right side up!

And finally, Isaiah's message in chapter 25 came home.

We do not have to live in scarcity and fear.  
There is bounty / fulfilment in following God.  
As Isaiah "figuratively" presented:  
With God life can be a feast full of rich food and fine wine.  
The darkness will end, as will fear and death.

God will wipe away the tears – there is GRACE. Grace to all with regrets and shame.

And, verse 9 notes: "We have waited for God.... and God came through – God saved us."

The bad guys didn't get stronger over time.  
We didn't have to kill them to be saved.

Maybe it never was an issue of good guy, bad guy. Maybe, all along, it was an issue of trusting God's way of justice, peace, love and grace?

Lingering in the empty tomb is the message: Go back to Galilee to understand what has happened. Go back to Galilee to discover the risen Christ.

Galilee is where it all began in Mark's book. Jesus came from Galilee. The message from the empty tomb is .... If you don't understand and if you need to see the risen Christ, then Go back to the beginning / reread the story..... OR better..... BE the story.

The Easter message is a message of hope and grace, but it is also an invitation to experience the risen Christ..... by following the way of Jesus.

Easter calls us to go out onto the byways to comfort those who are tormented, and to bring the hope of healing to those who are suffering.

Easter calls us to nurture disciples, to feed the hungry, to give to the poor, to stand up for the weak and powerless, and to boldly confront unjust leaders and laws.

The Power of the resurrection is like a mighty whirlwind / a twister that turns everything upside down..... included what is with in us!

The Power of the resurrection brings a NEW beginning, a beginning filled with grace.

We encounter this whirlwind when we meet the risen Christ.

And, ..... the whirlwind spins out love and grace... from those who become / join in the resurrection story.

Yet,..... both the Marys who were at the tomb have fled in terror?

Who believes and is NOT full of fear?

Who will go back to the beginning to meet Jesus?

Who will share the Good news.... that...God declared AMEN / YES to all that is and was Jesus!

Who is willing to follow Jesus back to the beginning to do it all over again?