

John 20:19-31

Happy Easter everyone! We begin our second week of Easter today - the Easter season being a rather long season in our liturgical cycle, lasting a full 50 days, in contrast to Christmas which lasts just 12 days. But this means we can keep on wishing people a happy Easter until June 9th! Easter season last awhile because the resurrection is so important to us as people of faith who proclaim the Good News that Jesus Christ is risen! And Easter is not only the onetime event of Jesus being risen that first Easter, it is a celebration of life itself. Perhaps at its most fundamental level we might want to ponder the question at Easter that undergirds the entire field of metaphysics, which is, simply put: "Why is there something instead of nothing?"

Why is there life? Why are we here? And why is it, then, that life triumphs over death in an ultimate sense? Because life does triumph over death when we look at the big picture. Let me give some examples. We could speak of it in terms of nature and the seasons – the way plants, flowers, and trees only seem to die in winter – but are actually dormant or changing in order to come back, springing to life another day. Right now in our backyard there is a large, beautiful tree that no one has been able to identify in terms of species. But it is gorgeous and the kids swing regularly from the 2 swings I attached to its strong, large branches.

During our first year in the house it was a very dry summer and fall and our tree lost every single leaf and the branches themselves began to look shriveled and dead. Absolutely nothing happened to make it look like it might survive over the next 3 months. I remember looking out the window and feeling fear and sorrow over it - had our tree died for good? But then, as if overnight in late April, little green buds appeared – and by early summer it was absolutely bursting with green and new life. I had been tricked again by nature....life triumphs over death. We could also speak of this Good News, of life's triumph over death in terms of biological evolution – the way science tells us that

the evolutionary itself process allows life to change and adapt and, over time, overcome the loss of life on planet earth through subtle or striking changes made to ensure survival. Life overcoming death. Or we could speak of this good news in terms of physics and the way, as Aaron Freeman once described why, *"You want a physicist to speak at your funeral. You want the physicist to talk to your grieving family about the conservation of energy, so they will understand that your energy has not died...and about the first law of thermodynamics; that no energy is created in the universe and none is destroyed...that all your energy, every vibration, every Btu of heat, every wave of every particle that was.... remains...in this world."*

Or we could speak of this good news in terms of religion: and remember that all the world's religions tell us and teach that death in this life is not the end – that death is simply a door to the next life, to new life of one sort or the other. That life triumphs over death. In the Church we proclaim this truth even more specifically- declaring that death itself have been triumphed over by God through Christ in the resurrection – a promise for all of us to embrace.

But do we want evidence that life overcomes death? If so, we are in good company – Thomas, who was actually quite faith-filled despite being called "Doubting Thomas" for demanding proof before believing in the resurrection, also wanted evidence. His proof came to him in the flesh in the form of Jesus showing up suddenly in their midst as the disciples hid in fear behind locked doors in his resurrected state. Today we have reports from multitudes of people who have experienced what we call "Near Death Experiences" -those who have come back to tell us about a life after death – and these accounts seem to offer us some kind of evidence of life beyond death.

And yet, faith is still required of us. And faith is required of us in our Christian tradition as we speak of the Good News in terms of Jesus –to trust that because he rose, we will rise one day too. The Good News that life triumphs over death is

essential to our understanding, purpose and mission as Christians. Easter not only offers us incredible hope and meaning beyond today, but it reminds us that we live in the light of eternity. Your story is not over, your story isn't over even at death.

I know I have several resurrection stories in my life. And during this season of Easter I invite you to contemplate, maybe even collect your stories of resurrection. When has death given way to new life in your experience? Pass those stories on to those you love – just as the disciples passed on their resurrection accounts of Jesus. Because you too have a Gospel to share- you have Good News to live out. As my Bible professor, Dr. Elizabeth Platt, used to say – *“Maybe the most important Gospel.. is the Gospel you will write with your life.”*

One of my resurrection stories is about the birth of my son Graysen. I had suffered multiple pregnancy losses and secondary infertility after my firstborn and it required major medical intervention to get a healthy pregnancy back in 2012. But everything seemed to go wrong on the day of his birth. It started in the morning on June 29th, when, at 38 weeks pregnant, I became extremely ill. I was rushed to the hospital with an unexplained fever of nearly 105 this was considered an emergency for any baby in utero. However, my symptoms pointed to a possible uterine infection, which meant that a C-section could become deadly to me. So the doctors decided to get my labor going as fast as possible with an emergency induction in hopes of saving us both. Throughout the labor there were complications upon complications, with Graysen often doing so poorly on the monitors that we would go back and forth about whether to do an emergency C-section and compromise my life in order to save his. Each time I would pray and suddenly, he would look better on the monitors...for a little while. After hours of this excruciating process it was time for me to push and we were all going to have to do the best we could to keep him alive despite the worrying signs on his monitors. A NICU team assembled in my room and as we began, I could see the panicked looks on the

doctor's and nurses faces. Their urging soon gave way to yelling... “Get him out now!” The NICU team was frantically prepping. My fear and sense of being alone to manage what was now a life or death situation rested on me and panic gripped me. I lacked faith, I doubted I could do this, I felt too weak, exhausted, and ill. I prayed for help- I needed God's help in a supernatural way. I summoned all my strength and through searing pain Graysen emerged into their hands - and as I looked at him – I saw he wasn't alive. He was gray, limp, not moving, not breathing, not showing any signs of life at all. The cord had been wrapped around his neck three times. They yelled out his Apgar score as they NICU team rushed him to the table -Apgar scores range from 0 to 10, 0 being dead. His score was a 1 – a 1 for an almost untraceably slow heartbeat – all other signs of life had left him. The NICU team had mere seconds to save him. They worked deftly and intubated him and started to pump oxygen into his body. I prayed in terror. And then his gray color started changing and gave way to pink. He started to move slightly. I called out to him, saying his name over and over again, loudly through tears – and then his right hand suddenly moved up and reached out towards me – towards the sound of my voice. I'll never forget it- he was fighting for his life and I urged him on, asking God to help him. Those miracle workers didn't stop working on him. And as I tell people now, that NICU team brought my son back to life...he was snatched from the grave and given a second chance to live. When the nurse finally handed him to me after he stabilized – I looked in his eyes and I saw life; I saw resurrection staring back at me. And that experience brought me a sense of faith I'd not known.

I have since thought about Thomas – about seeing the proof of resurrection with his own eyes and touching it with his own hands. I've done that. I've touched resurrection. And we are all a part of the Good News of Easter - and one day all of us, through faith, will know and see the power of resurrection. Life triumphs over death.

Alleluia!