

**“Now what?”**

## **EASTER SUNDAY**

**April 12, 2009**

*Text: Isaiah 55:1-9, John 20:1-23*

### I

Easter is about happy endings. And thank God! As we moved through Lent and Holy Week this past week, unavoidably, if we're paying attention, there's a lot of darkness.

With the heaviness and melancholy of the Upper Room experience, the deep pathos in the Garden of Gethsemane (*Not my will, but your will be done*), and then the unspeakable gloom of *Viernes Santo*—Good Friday—by Sunday, we're more than a little eager for a happy ending.

A father takes his little boy to a pet shop to pick out a puppy for his birthday present. For half an hour he looked at the assortment of pets in the window. Finally, his father asked him,

*Decided which one you want yet?*

*Yes, his son replied, pointing to the cute puppy wagging his tail, I want the one with the happy ending.*

I'm certainly a *happy ending* person ... and my guess is you are too.

### II.

As the 21<sup>st</sup> century unfolds, the glow of Easter lives on. Around our country and around the world, millions upon millions turn out for Easter celebrations. And that's even in the face of study after study suggesting that, increasingly, people identify themselves as more spiritual than religious.

How does that play out with you? Are you more spiritual, or religious? But, wait a minute, *do we have to choose? Can't we be both?*

Whatever we are and wherever we are in our spiritual/ faith journey, still, Easter draws us in. How can it not?

Look at what the Easter experience entails! Jesus dies an awful death and those who *knew him* first hand and *loved him* and who *saw so much of God in him* are distraught. Understandably, in spite of all the signs, they didn't want to lose him.

1. They wanted the warming in the heart they felt in his presence to be with them forever.
2. They wanted the hope they saw in his repeated acts of healing and love to have no end.

### III.

So, what's it all about? What it's about is that they want to stay connected.

- When we lose a cherished loved one, we're that way too.
- That's what love means: to keep the connection alive, particularly when that connection is so life-giving and reassuring about things that matter.

So—no surprise—what do they do on Sunday morning, at the first opportunity they have? They go to the tomb. Where else could they go to stay connected?

Think about your life, friends. Don't we, too, go to great ends to affirm our connections and to stay connected?

We used to write letters and make landline phone calls. However, in recent years, we've become more sophisticated, or *technologically advanced*. Now, we email or call each other on our cell. Or we contact each other on **FaceBook** or **MySpace**, neither of which I understand much at all.

And now there's this thing called **Twitter**. Can you believe that: **Twitter**. What kind of a name is that? It sounds so wimpy or trifling. These are all social net-working services where people update friends and family on their lives.

But this **Twitter** is weird. It's a networking of up to 140 characters sent by cell phone. The transmitted messages are called **tweets**. I think it's a verb. People *tweet* one another, updating them on the most inane details of their daily living.

Can we possibly be that bored? Apparently, yes.

Can you imagine the disciple Peter entering the empty tomb on Easter morning and *tweeting* the other disciples about his findings: ***Jesus not here; man in white robe says he's been raised, whatever that means ...***

But still, what this networking is all about is staying connected; perhaps a bit too connected. I've never *facebooked* or *myspaced*, and I certainly haven't *tweeted* anyone—at least, not yet—but I can understand wanting to nurture and affirm my relationships.

#### IV.

So, again, it's Easter morning, the disciples and those who loved Jesus are overcome with sorrow so what are they to do? They go to the tomb ... because that's where he's supposed to be.

And of course, when they arrive, he's not there. And weird things are happening. In John's gospel, Peter, first, and then John, enter the tomb ... and they see the linen wrappings and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head. But what does it all mean?

And then Mary Magdalene comes, later, sees Jesus; but she doesn't know it's Jesus. She thinks he's the gardener. But then Jesus, in his Easter body, speaks to her: **Mary**, he says. And immediately, somehow, she sees.

Faith is like that: mysterious and strange, but it draws us in with its warmth and reassurance.

Faith doesn't come to us in prose, but in poetry. It doesn't come in straight lines, but in curves. At some point, it's beyond logic and reason. It's a feeling, an impulse, a sense about the way things are.

What the Easter moment is, friends, is a presence—a presence that God is alive in Jesus in ways that transcend death and dying and darkness. It's a knowing in the heart, mind and spirit that love, compassion and forgiveness, caring and kindness are what our lives are to be about.

And then, later, in John's gospel, the risen Jesus appears among them and says, ***Peace be with you.*** After showing them his hands and feet, apparently to convince them, he says again, ***Peace be with you; as the Father sent me, so I send you.***

And then—something that we usually fail to mention—he ***breathes on them the Holy Spirit.***

#### V.

With all of this, how can we NOT be engaged, as the language and the imagery of ***The Easter moment*** draw us in? And so, the lingering question for us: ***Now what?***

What do we do? We've been to Easter services, listened to the sacred readings once again, heard the sermon, sung the hymns of celebration. What do we do?

Friends, what we do is ***be the hope, be the change, be the love ...*** wherever it is that we live out our lives. Always, the miracle and truth of Easter are passed on through us. For Easter to rock the world, we have to do our part. Again, ***be the hope, be the change, be the love.***

A few decades back, Jack Kemp was a star quarterback with the Buffalo Bills and later a United States Congressman. He told the story about the time his college football coach called him into his office for a talk ...

*Jack, he said, each year there's one player on our team that I keep my eye, just one. I'm going to tell you who that player is but I don't want you to tell anyone. This year, that player is Jack Kemp. If you live up to your potential, you have what it takes to achieve greatness.*

Motivated by his coach's little talk, Jack Kemp went to great ends to please his coach and became an outstanding football player.

Later, Kemp learned that coach had actually called each player into his office, essentially saying the same thing to each one of them. And as it turns out, each one of them practiced and played trying to live up to coach's expectations.

Hope, reassurance and instilling confidence are such positive forces in the human spirit.

***Now what?*** GO, and BE the hope, BE the change, BE the new day that Easter calls us to! What God wants and what Easter prompts in us as that we *go for it* in our lives. That we NOT be content to sit on the sidelines. That we *jump in*.

The truth is, friends, none of us ever knows to what heights of truth or self-discovery the Spirit can lead. We don't know, and so we have to *give ourselves* to the spirit.

## VI.

In the early 80's award-winning film, *Chariots of Fire*, **Eric Liddell**, a Scottish runner who ran for Great Britain in the Olympics following World War II, was the deeply religious son of missionaries in China.

As it happened the Olympics were in the same year that he was needed to help his parents in China. Eric's sister just assumed that he would answer God's call to serve and would decline the invitation to run in the Olympics. After all, which was more important, to run for one's own glory or to serve the glory of God?

Of course, for Eric, it was a lot more complex. He cared deeply for his parents and the missionary work in China (where he went on to serve for years). One day, trying to explain to his sister the importance of this opportunity to run, he said.

*Jenny, Jenny ... God made me fast ... and when I run, I feel God's pleasure.*

Eric Liddell had to run. Because when he ran, he felt fully alive. Always, what the Easter experience calls us to—what the gospel calls us to—is life.

***Now what?*** BE the hope, BE the change, BE the love, and BE the Good News!

Unless your eye believes, God will not be seen.  
Unless your ear believes, God will not be heard.

Unless your heart believes, God will not be loved.  
And unless your mind believes, God will not be known.

## VII.

It's Easter and we've been to the tomb. We don't know the truth about all the details. But we don't need to know. It's not about the details. It's about the feelings that pour over into the remnant community—the disciples along with Jesus' most ardent followers ... and, later, those first Christians.

It's about the uncontainable *warming from within*. Bottom line: they were different (the disciples and Jesus' followers). Something had happened. And the totality of the Easter experience built up, over time, into a powerful faith that *what* those first believers saw revealed in Jesus—in everything about him—was God's presence in the world, God's truth in the world and God's hope for the world.

On that first Easter: *Jesus came and stood among them and said, **Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.***

***Now what? That's what!*** Let us be sent, friends. ***Go and BE the Good News.***

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz  
Miami Lakes Congregational Church, *United Church of Christ*  
6701 Miami Lakeway South  
Miami Lakes, FL 33014  
On the web at [www.mlcchurch.com](http://www.mlcchurch.com)