

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

Good Friday should have taken no one by surprise! Jesus, with His liberal attention to the poor, the sick, the disenfranchised, and His unambiguous disregard for the authority claimed by human institutions – like the religious authorities, the ruling class, the scholars and teachers, and the Roman conquerors – ***was bound to get on the wrong side of those who wield the sword of judgment, punishment and death.*** And when you get on the wrong side of people in power, people who think they have a God given right to their authority – it will end badly for you. They shoot first, and ask questions later.

Just ask Rob Smith who was shot down by the Pierce County Sheriffs across the street in his own kitchen for making the mistake of wearing a sidearm while cooking dinner. ***Bottom line, failing to show a suitable degree of respect and deference to people in authority can end very badly for you.*** **Jesus simply told the truth** – the rich, the powerful, those wielding the sword, elevated religious leaders have no more claim to God's blessings than anyone else. So, what happened to Jesus on Good Friday shouldn't have surprised anyone with a lick of worldly wisdom.

What's more troubling to me is that enthralled by the power of evil and death everyone acts as though there has never even been a hint that the tomb might be empty. A week or two earlier ***hadn't the same Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead*** in Bethany, or the before that ***brought back that widow's son in Nain***, or ***before that said to dead***

little Jairus' daughter, "Get up little girl", **and she did**. *Jesus hadn't merely hinted that He would come back -- return from the dead; he told them plainly on three different occasions.*

So, why all the hysterics at an empty tomb?

Jesus says He will come back! And isn't that just what happened?

For those of us gathered here tonight who have sat and listened to the stories of our faith, we shouldn't be surprised either?

In the **midst of chaos, darkness, eternal death** **God comes**, **and says**, "Let There be light," **and there is**; "Let the waters be divided," **and they are**; "Let the dry ground appear," **and it does**; "Let there be grass and trees bearing fruit," **and there are**; "Let birds fill the skies," **and they do**; "Let living things inhabit the waters, **and they swim everywhere**"; "Let there be cattle and creeping things," **and there cattle and creeping things fill the ground**; "Let us make humanity in our own image," **and we are**.

God comes back day after day giving new life: pushing back chaos, overcoming darkness, creating life from death day after day – God will not rest until it is finished.

And even when a sinful, hurtful, debased humanity brings calamity upon itself and the world floods, God comes back to save Noah and his family, leaving behind a sign ensuring that creation will never again endure such a catastrophe. *God takes deadly water and brings forth a new beginning.*

When *Abraham obeys the Lord and takes his son, his own son, Isaac to sacrifice to the Lord*, **God comes back** and says "Stop! I will provide

the sacrifice,” and **God provides the sacrifice that day in the thicket and Good Friday in God’s own Son, God’s own Son.**

And when the power of oppression and death forces the Hebrew people to languish in slavery in Egypt, **God comes back**, confronts the death dealing pharaoh and leads His people by a pillar of cloud and fire **out of bondage and into freedom to worship and follow.** **God comes back** to deal with oppression and the power of death.

And when **God’s people wander off and end up far from home** – dragged across the desert to serve the Babylonians as war captives for three generations – **God comes back promising a great feast upon their return home.** And God **sends Cyrus the Persian** to defeat their captors and bring them safely home to Jerusalem – **without money and without cost.** And now **Jesus prepares a feast of His own Body and Blood for us to herald our return home.**

And when the people of Israel feel that their days are ended, that they are a valley of dried up bones, **God comes back**, connecting bone to bone, sinew to sinew, placing skin on them and breathing new life into them. **God comes back** and **gives them new bodies.**

And when King Nebuchadnezzar in his arrogance seeks to force Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego to bow down and worship his false image or be thrown in a fiery furnace, **God comes Back, and there, in the furnace, a fourth person – who has the appearance of a god – dances with Meschach, Shadrach and Abednego.** Not a single hair of their head is even singed, and Nebuchadnezzar is forced to bow down to

the God of Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego.

And when our sisters Lois Svinth and Karen Whitmore receive the dreaded diagnosis of cancer, and say “*I refuse to die by chemotherapy,*” but will trust God in what is to come; **God Comes back**, and *now years later they remain among us – whole and defiant*. And when our friends June and Maxine and Chuck die, this community defiantly proclaims that **God will come back for them**, *and even that day we share with them Jesus feast of His Body and Blood*.

When all seems lost, at an end, hopeless, dead; when it appears certain that evil will triumph and the forgotten will suffer; when it seems as though our world has been abandoned to itself; **God comes back – in the flesh through a poor Galilean peasant girl, no less – and in Jesus confronts the world with the truth that God loves humanity and creation and deals a final blow to the power of evil, violence, oppression, indifference, hardness of heart, selfishness, greed, arrogance and the abuse of power. On this night God comes back to declare that death is terminal, illness is sick unto death, hatred dies alone, oppression will not have the final say, those who live by the sword will die by the sword.**

But He also tells us those who give even a cup of water to one of these little ones in my name will not lose their reward; when you do it unto the least of these – my brothers and sisters – you have done it for me; those who lose their life for my sake and the sake of the gospel will save their life, and He reminds us, “When I have gone and prepared a place for you, I

will come back and bring you to myself.”

We shouldn't be surprised! God always comes back!

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