

April 17 2022 Easter
Pr. Steve

A little call and response to begin.

I love this life.

(A little more enthusiasm--whew! it's going to be a long Easter...)

I love this life!

I love this world!

How can this great love be in me?

I want it to never end.

But--it will.

So, I came to Peace on Easter

To figure it out.

Amen.

Aren't you glad to be with so many wise people today?

It is a remarkable, remarkable beginning, and new beginning, that we speak of. Yet, I think the strangest temptation on Easter is to imagine that we really understand what Resurrection is. It's earth-quaking, shaking, soul-searing, mind-stretching, gut-wrenching, the mystery from beyond--terrifying, terrible, terrific--an overflowing ocean of compassion, washing through our consciousness, the cosmos, and beyond...that love is raising up the dead.

Who can fathom this? The first disciples thought it was nonsense, right? Nonsense.

Admit it. Admit it, at least for once in your lifetime. You need to admit it today, at least on Easter. And if you can't say it to me, you need to say it to yourself. Admit it.

Everyone you meet in this lifetime, you just walk up to them, and you look into their eyes, and you say, 'I love you. I love you.'

Oh, and you're beckoning with your own eyes.

'Don't you love me too? Do you love me? Do you love me?'

Of course, you don't say this out loud, or they'd call the cops. I know.

But it's what we all want. It's where all the pain in the world comes from--all the wounds that are unhealed because people feel unloved--and this is what Easter is all about: the fulfilling of that loving within us, a loving so strong it raises the dead.

Are you ready?

Now forever [when] this word is heard, there's another word that needs to be said with Resurrection--and that word is Death. *We walk through the valley of the shadow of death.* And we don't like to hear that do we? We don't want to feel boxed in, and we don't like feeling imprisoned.

We just love it when people tell us we're all exceptional. It's very popular in a society. Have you noticed? Oh, we just love to hear that of all the generations on the planet of Earth that have ever lived, *'You are living in the time when all the people are exceptional!'* Can I get an Amen for that one? Whew...

Death has many faces. I've had the opportunity to prepare, and accompany, many people as they approached death.

Gen Estensen was a matriarch of this congregation. She'd been failing, but I got word early one morning-- 'She's in Emergency at Kaiser in Walnut Creek. You'd better get there quick.' So I went, stepped into that emergency room [cubicle], you know, with the plastic curtain, put it behind me. Gen is propped up in the bed. She looks at me and she says, "Well, kiddo. This is it." Then she pats the bed and says, 'Sit down over here. Let's have our final talk." Wow.

And then there was Lois Babcock. Now, this is the most supreme, quiet, quiet introvert I think I've ever met. And on her deathbed, Lois looked at me, and she shocked me when she said, *"I think death will be a great adventure!"*

Then there's Dutch Fray--he was a down-to-business guy. *"God promised me he's going to resurrect me; God better come through!"* There it is.

It's also been fun over the years.... A variety of folks in this congregation and beyond enjoy exploring multiple faith traditions, don't we, Judaism, and Buddhism, and Sufis? And the number of folks who I've been with in their final days kind of say, with a gentle smile to me, 'I've enjoyed all of that, but, you know, I guess Jesus is enough for me right now.' Easy come, easy flow.

Some years ago, I was asked to join a family. They knew--doctors had made clear that their baby would be born with heart defects and not live long at all--and so, would I assist them at the hospital? The baby was born, had time with the parents, and then was given to me, swaddled. I was taken to a room next door and just rocked this little guy, sang to him. Prayed him into death.... I do intend to meet him in heaven.

And then there was Paul Ditzler, dying at 88 years old. We had our final conversation; we both knew this was the final conversation. I got ready to leave and Paul looked at me with these sparkling eyes. He says, 'The mystery, the mystery of it all.'

Death has many faces. There are also ugly and evil and wicked faces.

Like economic death--starving children everywhere (our country too), starving people of possibilities. Ecological death will return and face what needs to be done? ???

Social death--this discarding of people who don't fit in our American caste system--disabled, ethnicity, whatever it is.

Then there's noisy death, like the war in Ukraine, which is insane! The madness of it all.

I think the most vile [death] is soundless death, which happens in back rooms. It's the abuse of power—in the corporations, or Congress. It's always so soundless. [It's] destroying democracy; it's destroying community. Just small, quiet decisions. And that's what poisons us, what leads to our apathy and cynicism. And we don't want to hear it, and it makes us so weary.

But our God has a passion for life. And our God is a passion for life.

A God who will not abandon us. A God who makes Easter a protest against death.

A God who promises to raise us up--the whole earth being remade and renewed in creativity and joy and possibility. Big Love.

Okay, okay. Okay. I've gone too far. I know. I understand. There's times we just can't take it, aren't there? When that word Resurrection, that's just too strong for us.

"You can't go there, Preacher. 'Big Love.' It's nice idea, but don't expect me to get engaged, please."

This Jesus, the God-man, man-God, was not only raised up by love, but also raised us up with him, because we are inextricably bound in a love and compassion which can never be severed. It's the love that brought us into being. It's the love that sustains us now. It's the love that will complete our days.

Easter is a feast of freedom. We're free, given the courage, to say no to destruction, and yes to love and help. How can this great Love be in us?

Big Love.

Christ is risen, Hallelujah!

Christ is rising, Hallelujah!

We are rising, Hallelujah!