

E A S T E R Sunday, April 5, 2015, Year B

"... and by his glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of our enemy..." (Easter Collect)

- *"It is finished."* We heard these words at the end of our Good Friday Gospel. They were Jesus' last words before he died. Given how we typically use the word *"finish,"* we hear Jesus' last words in a *particular* way. 'It's *over!* It is *done!*' Darkness and death seem to have triumphed. Mortal humanity has not withstood the test of barbaric human evil. But here is a *surprise:* by saying *"finished,"* Jesus did *not* mean *"over and done,"* as our everyday use of English leads us to think. The Greek New Testament helps us see that he also meant *"completed," "accomplished"* and *"fulfilled."*
- *To us, ends are usually the opposite of beginnings.* One thing *ends,* and then, another thing *replaces* it. But the word, *end,* has a richer meaning. We recognize this meaning when someone asks us, "what end are you aiming at?" End can mean the goal or the point of something, not just its termination. A familiar saying of Jesus in the Sermon of the Mount helps us see this. *The same verb in John that is translated as "finished,"* is the verb in Jesus' statement, *"Be ye perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect."* Far from referring to our moral behavior, Jesus means something more nuanced. He is saying: *'Be brought to your fulfillment as a human being; flourish,* even as your heavenly Father is *flourishing.'* And so, the *end* of Jesus' crucifixion was not simply that his suffering was *done;* through his crucifixion, he *achieved* God's purposes for the world. *The last word in Jesus' human life was the first word of his continuing life in God. Purpose has overcome resistance, and holy order has overcome demonic chaos.*
- *This is an ancient theme.* From the beginning of creation, we find in Scripture great ambivalence about the relationship between the beauty of divinely given order, and disturbing images of chaotic disorder. The disorder is sometimes suggested by the forces of nature around us, and sometimes symbolized by mythic beasts. Throughout the Scriptures, the ocean and the deep are metaphors for the realm of danger and evil, and the dark abode of sea monsters who would devour us.

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- These forces are not unfamiliar to us. For *who, and what, really rules this world?* Think about recent news stories concerning our relationship with Russia, regarding the Ukraine; our relationship with China, regarding the South China Sea; or our relationship with Iran, regarding their nuclear program. As bad as they are, *these relationships and their troubling conflicts are secondary. They pale, they absolutely pale, compared to the conflict between the spiritual forces that oppose our God, and God's love for this world.*
- To make this more plain, suppose that all three of these potential conflicts *simply go away*; that peaceful intentions and international good will *unexpectedly* prevail. And, suppose that North Korea, ISIS and Boko Haram *immediately* announce peaceful intentions and renounce their current methods for pursuing their goals, or *their ends*. *Would the world, and our lives, suddenly be safe?* Would we *no longer* have anything to worry about? Would everything be under control, and subject to our planning?
- Can you guess why I will say, *'No,'* to these rhetorical questions? It's because *something around us and even in us, some force or principle of resistance, a dynamic of entropy, is still at work in this world. We can see it in our own lives.* We can see it at work in our families, despite our love and care for them. And we can see it in our schools and places of work, and in our public institutions of government and commerce.
- *We want to be safe. And, we want to be saved.* And the things from which we want to be saved *are not simply trivial*, like being saved from embarrassment and public humiliation, or spared from being found wrong. *Instead, we want to be saved* from the power of evil lurking within the cells of our bodies, within the subconscious thoughts of our minds and in the poorly discerned motivations of our hearts, not to mention the evil intentions within us and within others. *We know these things are real, and they scare us.*
- It is because *these are actual, everyday,* concerns for most of us that I mention them this morning. This may seem incongruous, on a morning about which our culture disposes us to expect happy platitudes and bright, pastel colors. Yet, I

point straight at *the dark things* of this world on Easter Sunday precisely because the resurrection of Jesus dealt squarely with *all* of them. For we gather here to experience more than an emotional uplift or attitude adjustment. We are we here to reaffirm *deeper* truths, and go forth strengthened to *live* by them. *Even to die for them*, should that come to us in this uncertain world. As we will pray in our prayers for the newly baptized in a short while, "Grant, O Lord, that all who are *baptized into the death* of Jesus Christ your Son *may live in the power* of his resurrection!" *Easter faith begins with Baptism into a death*, even death on a cross, so that we may *then* experience Resurrection power!

- The Resurrection of Jesus is all about *grounded hope*, and the strength to *persevere in the face of adversity*. I share with you this morning a powerful and evocative image of its significance. It is a painting that builds upon the ancient biblical imagery of *chaos manifest as a sea monster*. It is about how death and resistance to the order of Creation, and the will of God, are all around. Peter Koenig's *Good Shepherd Resurrection* is brilliant in its conception, precisely because *it is so counter to our culture-bound world* of Easter bunnies, daffodils and fresh flowers. Now—*for sure*—I want my young grandchildren to have happy Easter baskets filled with treats. But adults need an adult faith. For adults, *the Resurrection of Jesus is not mainly about hopeful feelings*, a positive attitude and self-improvement, even though it *can enable* these things. *The Resurrection of Jesus is really about the defeat of evil and death, and triumph over pain and suffering*. We may not immediately experience that defeat and triumph in our every moment of need. But, *we live by Easter faith, and not by Easter feelings*.
- And so, Peter Koenig risks showing us the Risen Lord stepping out of the *mouth of a sea monster*. The fresh water from his side recalls his crucifixion, and also the water from the rock in the wilderness. Both give us fresh water that fulfills genuine human need, as compared with the inhospitable salt water in which the dragon finds its abode. *Every one of us is the lamb, held safely upon his shoulders, as he carries us out of the jaws of death into the new life where he is preeminent*. To me, this is real hope. Precisely because it is hope that

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deals with *where I am now*, rather than hope for something that *might be, some day, somewhere*. Both you and I want the kind of hope that squarely addresses *all the things we've been worried about this last month*. We all want hope that squarely confronts all the things we fear might go wrong in the coming month. And *that* is the kind of *real* hope that God brings to us in Jesus' resurrection.

- Alleluia! Christ is Risen!



Peter Koenig, *Good Shepherd Resurrection*