

The Power of Love

Easter Sunday — April 20, 2025

*The power of love is a curious thing.
It can make one man weep and another man sing.
It can change a hawk into a little white dove.
It's more than a feeling, the power of love.*

—Huey Lewis and the News

There are pop songs that tell us that: “Love Hurts”; “You Can’t Hurry Love”; “Love Is A Battlefield”; “All You Need Is Love.” We even hear that “Love Bites.”

And all of these sentiments, to a greater or lesser extent, are true. Love is a rollercoaster. It is often hard. Probably isn’t really love if it doesn’t get messy sometimes. Love is passion and pain and world-altering joy.

But deeper than anything Motown or the L.A. record industry could produce is the Gospel truth that we celebrate on Easter. I asked Achim to put “Love wins” on our outdoor sign last week, but truth be told, even that feels a little triumphalistic to me this year.

As I’ve been steeping myself in prayer with our scripture readings for today, what feels even more powerful this year is that love heals. Love heals. Love heals.

*First time you feel it, it might make you sad.
Next time you feel it, it might make you mad.
But do be glad baby when you’ve found
That’s the power makes the world go ‘round*

—Huey Lewis and the News

Here’s the curious thing about Easter: it’s the Great Re-Making of the World. It’s the Cosmic Do-Over.

Let’s step back. On Friday, I emailed two poems to the congregation. The first was Bertolt Brecht’s “When Evil-Doing Comes Like Falling Rain.” I sent that because the evil-doing that our world is experiencing right now feels cataclysmic. Like a hard rain, we’re all getting wet. If we aren’t personally experiencing the cruelty of the death dealing forces of the world, we’re being vicariously traumatized by people being disappeared and the fact that since October 7, 2023 an average of one Palestinian child has been killed every 45 minutes.

Our state legislature is working on bills that will make it even more dangerous to be trans in our state than it already is, and on Thursday one school shooting was overshadowed by another. Evil-doing is, indeed coming like falling rain.

Lest we imagine this boat we’re in is new, I remind you of Jesus’ arrest, abandonment, trial, and crucifixion. Every horror that we’re experiencing today pings on an aspect of the Gospel story.

The killing of innocents? Check.
Branches of government abdicating their responsibilities? Check.
Miscarriage of justice? Check.

Being incredulous at the behaviors of your neighbors, these people you thought were decent folks? In Jesus' day, they shouted "We want Barabas." This is the weariness, the numbness, that Mary Magdalene carried with her as she approached Jesus' tomb in the early dawn of that first Easter, not knowing which way was up, not knowing whether her very existence was going to hold together or whether the forces of chaos would somehow work their destruction on her body, too, and she would somehow devolve into her disparate parts. And what she experiences is the power of love, the cosmic reality that love is even stronger than death, that despite some of the oddest stage presence ever, Captain and Tennille were right, and love will keep us together.

Leveraging Easter

I recently read the quote that exemplifies what Easter can mean in our lives:

When life breaks you,
it is because you are ready to be put back together differently.
Every piece of you that feels shattered
is a piece that will find a new place,
a new purpose, a new meaning.
Trust that the cracks are where the light gets in.
Sometimes it is in our brokenness
that we find our greatest wholeness.
We find the courage to rebuild,
to reimagine,
to redefine what it means to be strong.
You are not broken; you are breaking through.

In my experience, this needs a little nuance. I don't think that when we're broken we're necessarily at a place where we are ready to be put back together. Sometimes, when we're broken, there's A LOT of time in the tomb. Holy Saturday, the time the church understands Jesus to have been in the tomb, can feel like an eternity.

I'll come back to this in more depth in a sermon sometime in the future, but Irish poet David White warns us not to emerge from the tomb too early. In some wild alchemy that only the Divine can orchestrate, tomb time "is a way of staying alive...a way of holding ourselves until we are ready to come into the light.

Even hiding the truth from ourselves can be a way to come to what we need in our own necessary time. So, rather than saying that when we're broken it means that we're ready to be put back together, I'd say that when we're broken, there will come a time when we're ready to be put back together differently. THAT is Easter. That moment when, finally, after the pain wrecked by the evil-doers, after the desolation and the darkness as well as the rest and protection of the tomb, you will be ready to emerge, you will be ready for new life to blossom forth within you.

Now here's the cruel part. It's not going to be the same life. That life died. Forever. But you know what didn't die? Love.

I also take exception to the last line of the quote that says, "You are not broken, you are breaking through." The truth of Good Friday is that we will indeed be broken. And the glory of Easter is that by the grace of God, like Jesus, we have the potential to break through.

There's a story of a professor at Johns Hopkins in the 1950s who did a now famous psychology experiment in which he drowned rats. The experiment would never get past a university's ethics standards today, and rightfully so. Nonetheless, his findings were stunning. In the experiment, he placed rats into buckets filled with water and observed how long they survived. He found some variation between domesticated rats and wild rats.

After introducing a number of variables, the last experiment he did was to observe the rats to the point where they gave up and were about to drown. Just before they died, he rescued them. He saved them, held them for a while and helped them recover. He then placed them back into the buckets and started the experiments all over again. What he discovered was that his hypothesis was right. When the rats were placed back into the water they swam and swam for much longer than they had the first time they were placed in the buckets. The only thing that had changed was that they had been saved before and so had hope this time.

Conclusion

Friends, our Easter homework is this: to take our time in the tomb, to allow the divine to work their wonders on us, body, mind, and soul, and to trust that Holy Wisdom is knitting us back together, albeit differently than before. And also, to be that force of hope, to be the hand that plucks the rat out of the water at the moment of death, reassuring it that hope is not only possible, it is the very Divine force that is going to keep us alive.

In his final sermon at All Saints Cathedral, Episcopal Priest Mike Kinman wrapped up with this:

If I can leave you with one challenge, one gift, as we part, let it be this:
Each day, find one person.
One person who is crying out.
One person who is asking for help.
One person who is shrinking away.
One person who is as different from you as you can possibly imagine.
One person whom you are absolutely too busy to spend time with.
Whom you are tempted to dismiss or demonize.
Who is on the side of the road on which you are traveling.
Who is absolutely a distraction from things that everyone including you believe is so much more important.
And stop.
Stop what you are doing and listen to their cry. Invite them to share themselves with you.
Learn each other's names.
Listen, listen and listen some more.
And then when you are done listening to listen some more
And then tell them what you have heard and ask "Did I get it right."
Ask "what would you have me do for you."
Give them a word of courage.
A word of companionship. A word of love.
And receive the word they have for you.
And there will be healing.
And there will be joy.
And one meeting at a time, we will begin to travel together along the way.
Because as American Buddhist author Pema Chodron says "If we learn to open our hearts, anyone, including the people who drive us crazy, can be our teacher."

You see, the truth of Easter is this:

First time you feel it, it might make you sad
Next time you feel it, it might make you mad
But you'll be glad, baby, when you've found
That's the power makes the world go 'round

(feel free to join in with me)

And it don't take money, don't take fame
Don't need a credit card to ride the Easter train
It's strong and it's sudden, it can be cruel sometimes
But it might just save your life
That's the power of Love.

The second poem that I sent to the congregation on Friday was this piece from Anne Lamott, entitled "How Easter Has Changed for Me":

When I was 38, my best friend, Pammy,
died, and we went shopping
about two weeks before she died,
and she was in a wig and a wheelchair.
I was buying a dress
for this boyfriend I was trying to impress,
and I bought a tighter, shorter dress than I was used to.
And I said to her, "Do you think this makes my hips look big?"
and she said to me, so calmly,
"Anne, you don't have that kind of time."
And I think Easter has been about
the resonance of that simple statement; and that when I stop,
when I go into contemplation and meditation,
when I breathe again and do the sacred action
of plopping and hanging my head
and being done with my own agenda,
I hear that, 'You don't have that kind of time,'
you have time only to cultivate presence
and authenticity and service,
praying against all odds
to get your sense of humor back.
That's how it has changed for me.
That was the day my life changed,
when she said that to me.

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