

## The Whisper of New Creation – Easter Sunday April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014

We are surrounded by signs of new life. After a very long, grey winter, the snow has finally receded enough that we see a hint of life in our gardens: bulbs are sprouting, buds are growing on trees, the birds have returned, and there is that fresh earth smell in the air. Soon, the creatures that have been sleeping the winter away in the mud will begin to wake up and emerge into a new season. New life everywhere.

Some of this new life makes a lot of noise: birds chirping, frogs and toads croaking, melt-water runoff rushing. But other spring things hardly make any noise at all: we don't hear the flowers grow or the tadpoles turning into frogs.

We also see signs of where life has died, and then new life has come through that death – saplings growing out of fallen tree trunks. And then there are things like cicadas and caterpillars. We come across an empty cocoon or an empty beetle shell and we know that something miraculous has happened, even though we weren't around to actually see it happen. At some secret point, the new creature quietly emerged from its old shell of a body and flew off with its new life and a flurry of colour. Most of the time, new life in creation is quiet.

My mom spent many years breeding Newfoundland Ponies – a protected Canadian heritage breed. They used to be used for logging and mining, and had almost become extinct until a few folks took a keen interest in reviving the species.

Every time my mom had a mare due to foal, she desperately wanted to be there for the birth. The trouble is, most mares will give birth in the night when no one is around. So mom would diligently check on her ponies throughout the night so that she could witness the birth. Sometimes, she even slept on the couch in her tack room. But out of all those ponies born on her farm, she only witnessed a birth once. Once, she planned to sleep out in the tack room, went back to the house for a snack or something, and came back out to find that the mare had given birth in her absence. She was convinced that the mares were conspiring against her.

Most of the time, new life arrives unannounced, quietly, mysteriously, and in secret. The only way we know that something miraculous has occurred is that we see the new life that has emerged after the fact – the empty shell or cocoon, the mare with her foal, the sudden opening of a tulip, or the sneaky arrival of a leaf poking out of a bud.

I think the empty tomb on Easter morning was one of those sneaky and mysterious moments. No one actually witnessed the resurrection. No one actually saw Jesus rise from the dead. It was a quiet resurrection – just between the Father and the Son. Unlike his first “birth”, there wasn't any heavenly choir announcing his arrival this time. People didn't travel great distances to see him. There was just an empty tomb, some empty grave clothes, a few sad and confused disciples, and a gardener.

The story of resurrection, the Easter story, is a story about new life and new creation. And not just any new creation, but THE New Creation – the time when God will actually begin to make the world new again, to restore the old broken-down creation to its original intended goodness, to restore the broken

relationships between people and God and people and people to their original intended fellowship with God himself.

This New Creation story begins in the darkness, just like the first creation story did. This New Creation story tells about light and life, just like the first one did. Jesus, the gardener, is bringing a new world, new creation, new life into being – just as he did the first time (John 1:3-5). But the first time around, Adam and Even were driven out of the garden weeping for all they had lost. This time, Mary leaves the garden rejoicing for all she has been given.

When Jesus' disciples began to hear the rumours that Jesus was alive, they gathered together in secret, in locked rooms, for fear that that the Jews or the Roman soldiers would think they were staging an uprising. They whispered the news to one another, and wondered together what was going on. And then, mysteriously Jesus appears among them and they are amazed. Frederick Buechner says that even though this was the most extraordinary thing to ever happen to them, they could only whisper it – you have to lean in close to hear.

If we lean in close enough, we might hear something extra-ordinary. For the most part, Easter is the biggest and most important celebration for Christian people. This is the time when we celebrate that there is now no longer any barrier between ourselves and God. Centuries of turning away from God have been turned around in Jesus. Jesus has taken all of our humanity and healed it, made it whole again, made it fit to keep company with God himself. And the resurrection testifies to the fact that God's promise of eternal life with him isn't an empty promise. Death really has been destroyed. Think of the physics and the biology of it – a human being being fully revived and resuscitated after spending (roughly) 3 days in the grave. It's against every law of nature and science that could ever possibly exist.

Jesus' new life – his resurrected life, which won't ever die again, is the new life that he has given to each one of us. And because of this creation-altering miracle, Christians tend to make a pretty big deal about Easter. It *is* a pretty big deal. Because if Christ hasn't been raised from the dead in real and actual fact (rather than in just a 'spiritual' way), then we are still in our sins, we are still separated from God by death, and there is no hope for anything for any of us beyond that day when we draw our last breath. The apostle Paul tells us that if Jesus hasn't been raised, everything we have ever believed, and all the trust we have placed in God has been a waste of time (1 Cor 15:12-19).

But we know that he *has* been raised. The disciples bear witness to this fact. And when they leaned in close to hear, they heard their names: 'Mary' calls Jesus the gardener, 'Peter' calls Jesus the fisherman and beach-BBQer, 'Thomas' calls Jesus the peace-giver. Mary and the disciples speak with the risen Jesus, eat with him, spend time with him. Jesus meets other disciples along the road, talks with them, stays with them.

Just because they didn't see the actual resurrection, doesn't mean they didn't witness the results of that resurrection. This incredible news is the reason we celebrate Easter with such joy, such enthusiasm, such thanks, such fanfare.

But, that first Easter wasn't celebrated with such fanfare. It was celebrated quietly, told in whispers. The signs of new life and of New Creation popping up amongst them unannounced and sometimes

unnoticed. The New Creation evident as their Lord called their names and sent them on their way rejoicing and sharing with each other the incredible news.

It is good to celebrate Easter with enthusiasm, with shouts of praise, and with loud and wonderful music. It is good to call out to one another, “He is risen!” But it is also good to lean in close and look for the quiet and miraculous signs of New Creation and new life that would get overlooked otherwise. It is also good to be quiet long enough to be able to hear Jesus calling our own names.

So, I want to leave you with a couple of images this morning.

First, just as we experience signs of new life all around us during spring time, we also see and experience signs of ultimate New Life, the coming of the final and eternal New Creation, all around us. The empty tomb is like the cicada shell or the empty cocoon – evidence that a miracle has happened. But what is left behind isn’t as important as what has emerged. Jesus has come out of the other side of death. He has come out with beauty and flight and is breathing new life into his creation – the one he made originally, and the one he has made new. Look for it. Look for the signs of that new life.

And so, when you look outside at the signs of spring, or witness the emergence of a butterfly from a cocoon, or the birth of a new baby, or someone experiences restored mental or emotional health, or someone is given another chance to make things right, or forgiveness restores broken relationships - don’t just smile and love it and talk about how wonderful it all is. Give credit where credit is due. Because Jesus has overcome death and decay, all of the signs of spring and new life and second chances that you see are evidence that Jesus continues to hold together and sustain *his* creation. All of the babies that are born are signs that Jesus has breathed life – life that is fit for the kingdom – into each one. All of the restoration that happens within people and between people is made possible by the ultimate restoration of humanity to God. All of these things are evidence of something far greater than the simple seasons of nature or self-improvement or positive feelings. They are evidence that Jesus lives.

And second, lean in close so you can hear him calling your name. Barbara Brown Taylor (theologian and professor) cautions us Easter people to “Never get so focused on the empty tomb that you forget to speak [or hear from] to the gardener.” There is an empty tomb left behind, and Jesus has emerged to call each one of us by name – wherever we happen to be. Whether we are weeping in sadness and confusion in the garden, or going about the duties of our daily lives, or on the road to somewhere, Jesus calls us. He is calling us to live this new and resurrected life with him and his Father. It’s a life full of love. It’s a life full of fellowship, not isolation. A life full of light and purpose, not darkness and chaos. It’s a life full of life, not full of death. **HE IS RISEN. HE IS RISEN INDEED.**