

*“The Great Equalizer”*

*Psalm 118:14-29; Acts 10:34-43; I Corinthians 15:1-11; Mark 16:1-8*

*Easter Day, April 5, 2015*

*Mary Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church, Milford, Connecticut*

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The Lord is Risen! He is risen, indeed!

We say this as if it is the most obvious thing in the world. The Lord is risen from death. Yet for many people it is not obvious. Death is simply the great equalizer, the democracy of death, the final answer, the last word. Death is the video screen that flickers “Game Over.” An Italian proverb declares, *“Once the game is over, the king and the pawn go back into the same box.”*

Remember being a kid hollering *“Me, first!”* Whether going for ice cream or the front seat in the car, we wanted to be first. Sometimes as adults, the best selection, the biggest piece, the rarest color become our Holy Grail as we seek center court attention and the all-too-fleeting feeling of importance.

So how come we don't say that on Easter? Me, first! If death leads to resurrection, why aren't we raising our hand?

In part, because we know life is a gift from God, to be savored and celebrated, just as Jesus did, saying: *“I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly.”* Our days are never long enough for all the enjoyment we might receive and all the good we might do. Spiritually speaking, living abundantly here is a foretaste of eternal joy: *“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.”*

Yet some of us fear death because we're convinced it's the end, that there's nothing beyond the grave but an empty void so you'd better grab as much now as you can without regard to anyone else. Our fear drives our passions: buff is beautiful because we're in denial that our bodies will betray us. Eat, drink and be merry. This fear can become a living death, robbing us of hope and leading to cynicism and corruption of every kind.

What God says in response it, basically: *Death? Ha! You ain't seen nothin' yet!* Tony Robinson is a United Church of Christ pastor who coaches pastors ([www.anthonibrobinson.com](http://www.anthonibrobinson.com)). Tony says that in the first half of his ministry people would say to him, "I have a problem with the Resurrection" and he would say "*Well, it's just a metaphor and you shouldn't really worry about it and just live as a good person.*" And then God got hold of Tony Robinson. Now when people say to him "*I have a problem with the Resurrection*" he says "*Of course you do. But don't worry. Stick around. We can help you with that.*"

Stick around. It ain't over 'til it's over. Resurrection is the plot-twist no one saw coming. But people did see it: over 500, according to today's letter from Paul to the Corinthians. Mike Slaughter observes that this letter was written within 30 years of Jesus' resurrection. Historical truth is not scientific truth. Yet scientist Francis Collins, the head of the Human Genome Project, ([www.pbs.org/wgbh/questionofgod/voices/collins.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/questionofgod/voices/collins.html)) believes. Historical truth relies on the credibility of the witnesses. If we said John Belushi was alive, we would quickly be contradicted by those who worked with him at Saturday Night Live. Paul cannot make his assertion without knowing it will be supported by those 500 reliable of those contemporary witnesses.

Yet today's Gospel seems less certain, doesn't it? Bible students know that Mark has a longer ending the authenticity of which is questioned. So we have Mark, who was the companion of Peter, giving the assurance of Jesus' resurrection from "a young man dressed in white" and the women, who had gone to anoint the body, fleeing in fear. But SOMETHING happened to which 2,000 years and 2.18 billion people today—nearly a third of the world's population—still give witness, according to the widely-respected Pew Forum ([www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org)).

So what happened? What happened to turn this small Jewish sect that followed an itinerant preacher in a far-flung outpost of the

Roman Empire into a faith that, today, is truly world-wide? Total Christian population in sub-Saharan Africa grew from 9% to 63% in the hundred years from 1910-2010? There, along with growth in Asia, is a most dangerous place to be Christian, as we saw in gruesome detail at the Kenyan college this week where at least 70 have died at the hands of self-described Muslims. Yet we grow.

It is the other equalizer, a greater equalizer than death bursting forth: sometimes because of us and sometimes in spite of us. In the fight of good against evil, life against death, there comes a time when all must be given; when each side in the battle must commit its last reserves, when nothing can be held back. On Resurrection Day death's last reserves have been used up. Only love remains. Death, the great equalizer, has been defeated by love, the greatest equalizer.

This is why Peter's reclamation in the story from Acts is an Easter reading. Peter, who chickened out, finds new power in love. Peter, who thought the Gospel was only Jews, discovers it is for everyone. Peter, who denied his Lord three times, declares "*I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.*" Eugene Peterson's modern paraphrase, The Message, says:

***Peter fairly exploded with his good news: "It's God's own truth, nothing could be plainer: God plays no favorites! It makes no difference who you are or where you're from—it you want God and are ready to do as he says, the door is open."***

Are we ready for this open door? Apparently Indiana and Arkansas were not, ready to legalize discrimination in the name of religion until public pressure mounted and the Governor of Arkansas' own son signed a petition decrying the law. How far we have NOT come in 50 years, when discrimination was legal in the old Confederacy. How much work remains to be done in the name of this Christ, whose resurrection not only promises life beyond the grave but an open door to full life here and now!

Are we ready? An old story has a visiting admiral chatting with some enlisted sailors on the deck of a U.S. Navy ship. The admiral asked *“What would you do if another sailor fell overboard?”* An enlisted man replied *“I’d raise the alarm and throw him a life preserver, sir.”* *“And what would you do if it were an officer?”* asked the admiral. The enlisted man paused and replied, *“Sir, which one?”*

Are we ready for this open door, this resurrection of love, the greatest equalizer? As Peter realized, it doesn’t matter...

...if you are Jew or Gentile: God’s door is open.  
...if you are a Republican, Democrat or independent: God’s door is open.  
...if you are a Yankee fan, a Red Sox fan, a Mets fan or—and this is bold!—  
a Baltimore Oriole fan: God’s door is open.  
...if you are a chorister or can’t sing a note: God’s door is open.  
...if your degree is from Yale College or life university: God’s door is open.  
...if you live in New Haven or Bridgeport or Milford: God’s door is open.  
...if you’re a man or a woman: God’s door is open.  
...if you are rich or poor: God’s door is open.  
...if you are straight, or gay, or lesbian or bisexual or transgender or  
questioning: God’s door is open.  
...if you are black or white or brown or olive-skinned: God’s door is open.  
...if your ancestors arrived in Milford with Rev. Peter Prudden on the ships  
“Hector” and “Martin” in 1639; or Joseph Cinque on La Amistad in New  
Haven in 1839: God’s door is open.  
...if your mother was a society matron or an indentured servant, or your  
father was a stock broker or a bum: God’s door is open.

God’s door is open because the tomb is open. Death is dead!  
The great equalizer is vanquished by the greatest equalizer. Love  
is unleashed! We, disciples of the Lord of love, are promised  
eternal life, the foretaste of which is right here, right now, as we  
live the promises and dream the dreams and say again the chant,  
ever ancient and ever new: The Lord is Risen! He is Risen,  
indeed! Thanks be to God. Amen.