

3 Easter B
What Comes after Easter?

April 14, 2024
Luke 24:36b-48

Two weeks ago we celebrated the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. What should we do now? What should happen two weeks or two thousand years after Easter?

In our Gospel reading, the risen Jesus opens the disciples' minds so that they can understand scriptures. (We might wish that he would open our minds more because there is much we don't understand about the Bible.) Then he gives a very brief Bible study and simplifies it all. There are three parts to Jesus' teaching from the Bible.

Part 1: the Messiah will suffer. It's easy to believe that the Messiah suffered. We have times of suffering during our lives on earth.

Part 2: The Messiah will rise from the dead on the third day. First of all, this means that the Messiah died. He did more than just suffer; he died. It's easy to believe in death. We've all had friends and relatives die; sometimes with some suffering, sometimes without.

Secondly, the Messiah rose from the dead on the third day. We believe that. We confess it in our creeds. We gather on Sunday mornings because that's an anniversary of the resurrection. It is what gives us hope throughout our lives where there is suffering and death.

One of the examples of hope I've read is in a book called, *Crossing the Bar: Home by Another Way*. It's written by Jim Johnson, a former Lutheran pastor who, used to own the Bull 'n Bear Saloon and Casino in Red Lodge, Montana. It's filled with stories and insights that bring together his Lutheran theology and the characters in the bar – most of whom want nothing to do with church.

One story is about Eddie and his 33-year-old daughter, Mary. She was diagnosed with a tumor. On the day before the surgery, Jim offered to drive Eddie the 70 miles to the hospital in Billings, so he could see her beforehand. Eddie said that he wasn't going to go. "I don't like hospitals," he exclaimed. "I'll see little Mary when she gets home."

Jim, perhaps more like a bar owner than a pastor said, "Ed, I'll be there tomorrow morning and you're coming with me! This isn't about how much you hate hospitals. It's about a daughter who needs her daddy!"

Unfortunately, an infection set in after the surgery and Mary died. As Jim and Eddie were heading home from the hospital, Ed blurted out, "I hate hospitals! Everyone I've ever cared about who had gone to the hospital came out dead."

Jim put on his pastor's hat.

Ed, I know that you and I have spent a lot of time bantering back and forth across the bar about God and all, but this is where the rubber meets the road. This is where God steps in and says, right in the middle of even death, that there's hope. That hope is what I believe Jesus is all about.

Eddie was not willing to accept that. He said with dead certainty: "There is no hope. Mary's dead, and I've got to get used to it."

A few months later Jim went to Eddie's ranch. They were walking along the Red Lodge Creek that ran through the ranch. After some conversations, Jim asked if he would be willing to think about something:

If God can create a life *once*, as you have said time and again that he does, what's to stop God from re-creating that same life once again? That's pretty much what Christians mean when we talk about the hope of resurrection and eternal life in heaven with God. God chooses to give us life again.

I trust that, Ed. It is what gives me hope for my life and hope when people I love die. That same hope is there for you.”

“I'll have to think about that one,” Ed finally said, breaking a long silence.

Apparently, Ed did think about it. Some weeks later when Jim was bartending, he overheard Ed telling a friend, “You know, I've been thinking ... if God can create life a first time, why couldn't he create the same life a second time?”

For Ed, it's still a question, but there's hope.¹

Live after Easter means a life with hope: hope in the midst of suffering and hope in life that goes beyond death.

Part 3 (remember I said that there were three parts): Jesus told the disciples: “Repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”

Life after Easter means more than just believing that Jesus suffered, died, and was raised; it also means that we have to share the message with the world – starting in Jerusalem. Well, not actually Jerusalem, but that's where the disciples were at when Jesus spoke to them. We start right where we are with our families, our neighbors, our friends.

Interestingly enough, the proclamation is not primarily about Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, but repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

The church has not always done a very good job of proclaiming repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Churches are not usually seen as places of forgiveness. I've talked to many ex-church-goers who felt no forgiveness in church, but only judgment. That comes up often with the people at the bar in the book.

Judgment isn't necessarily bad. Being told about our sins is sometimes necessary, but the language at the end of Luke indicates that our job is not just to point out other's sins – to make them feel guilty. It is not just to call people to repent of those sins. Our ultimate task is to lead people to have those sins forgiven; forgiven by God when they recognize they've sinned against God, but also forgiveness from us when they have sinned against us.

Each of you should know and believe that when leaving this worship, you are forgiven children of God. You receive forgiveness in the holy meal Christ shares with us. That's what we should be about after Easter – proclaiming repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Eddie was clear on the ride back home from the hospital that he did not and could not believe what Jim was telling him about resurrection and hope. That didn't keep the two friends apart. That didn't keep Jim from learning from Eddie about life without that hope, and trying to figure out ways to talk about our hope because Jesus was raised from the dead in ways that would make sense to Eddie.

Jim embodied the kind of acceptance that Jesus proclaimed – acceptance even for

¹ Johnson, Jim, *Crossing the Bar: Home by Another Way*, excerpts from pages 76-84

those who could be considered enemies: those who disagree with me, those who won't believe me; those who are angry at me. We share Christ's peace with such people. We forgive such people. We seek to proclaim life and forgiveness to such people in ways that make sense to them.

What comes after Easter is that the church is now the body of Christ in the world. We are the flesh and blood presence of Jesus Christ in the world. What we say and do is not just for ourselves, but also as witnesses of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection; that Jesus Christ fulfills the scriptures; but even more than witnesses of those events, we are also recipients of the forgiveness of sins that comes through repentance. We are to share that with our closest friends and neighbors and with all nations. That's what comes after Easter.