

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

I don't know quite how to say this, but I have a friend who died once. If his story is to be believed, he died on the table after a horrific evening, and that's when things got bad. He was clinically dead, but, through the miracles of modern science, he was revived and still walks the streets. He's in a bad way, still, and his life is filled with what if and why me kinds of questions. Some days, I wonder the same for him. But more than anything, I wonder the same for all of us. What if, and why?

Even for the more optimistic among us, there's something in the way we're wired that makes awful moments stick out. Maybe it's an evolutionary thing. Maybe it's more likely for the species to survive if I remember that, say, some berries are poisonous. Think of it this way. If most things won't cause us harm, then we probably don't have to make a mental note every time we survive a tasty fruit-based snack. But, when you encounter that one in a hundred that leads to unpleasant results, it pays to remember which bush it came from. Maybe that carries into our lives in other ways. Take my mother, for example. My mother carves turkeys in the least sensible way because, one time, when she tried the "right way," she almost donated a thumb to the dinner table. My uncle took the most circuitous routes on his daily commute because, one time, when he sped down the straight shot home, he got t-boned at an intersection by somebody running a red light. My dad refused to change his socks for a full four months, because, one time, when he suffered a lapse in judgment and did change, his beloved Cardinals snapped a winning streak. Sometimes this works out for us. I've never seen my mother slip with a knife since she changed her approach, never seen my uncle get in a wreck, never seen my dad so happy as when his nasty sock-fueled Cardinals took it all come October.

But, returning to my friend that came back from beyond the brink of death, if berries and busted streaks are enough to calcify in our memories some unpleasant event, then surely a brush with death takes the cake. Sure, we're all concerned with our own mortality to some degree or another, but this guy, this guy is haunted by it. 'Cause this guy has tasted that bitter berry and wants no part of it again; rather, he wants no part of it but is also hunted by the worry that only that berry will relieve the suffering he feels every day. For him, being dead ain't all it's cut out to be, but it's also everything he could hope for.

Paul talks about this over in his letter to the Romans: "I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." So my friend, waking up day after day haunted by life regained can barely focus on the gift that each day brings and instead tries with all his might to avoid another terrible brush with the very thing that haunts him, living, but only barely, while trying not to die.

You'd think you'd remember somebody coming back from the dead. There are no fewer than 10 resurrections in the Bible. Most of them are intentional, some accidental. And these resuscitations are all associated with big names. Elijah gets one, a boy. Elisha gets two: the first was a boy. But the second was a man whose own body was tossed into a grave alongside Elisha's, and merely the contact with Elisha's bones brings him back to life. Now Jesus gets no fewer than five: Lazarus, a couple of children, himself, and a whole slew of saints that emptied their tombs as the earth shook and the temple veil tore at the moment of his death. Paul gets one, a boy defenestrated by Paul's own long-winded preaching. And Peter, one, a disciple named Tabitha.

How many of us remember these life giving moments? How many of us were surprised to hear that the gift of a second chance at life was shared with more than just Jesus and his friend Lazarus? I'll be honest. I had

to Google “resurrection stories in the Bible” to make sure I wasn’t missing any. Full disclosure: I was. I’d forgotten about Peter and Paul, forgotten the stunning miracles ascribed to their names, forgotten the power of resurrection even there. You’d think you’d remember somebody coming back from the dead.

That’s just the thing. We don’t. If it weren’t for the revelry of Fat Tuesday and the drudgery of Lent, would we still remember to pause some Sunday every Spring to recall that quintessential Resurrection? We set aside a solid 50 days to hold that event in our memories. Maybe if we didn’t, we’d lose sight of a whole lot more than oversized candles and white vestments. How long would it take us, moving through our calendar, to forget what we’re about, to forget that resurrection chases us through the centuries, chases us right up to now, right into our lives? When we forget our stories of resurrection, our stories of everyday life punctuated with miracle, when we forget those stories of resurrection, how long before we’re no longer able to see them? How long before we’re so afraid of life that we no longer live? How long before we’re so sanitized in belief that we no longer see new life sprouting where only death stood before? How long before we no longer recognize resurrection?

But here’s the great thing about being human. We move through cycles, seasons of life, of fear, of dying, of living again. We have days that make no sense and weeks that make us happier than we could imagine. We have opportunities to give and just as many opportunities to receive, occasions to teach and--hopefully--even more occasions to learn. My friend, the one I started this sermon with, my friend died. His new life continues to be a complicated jumble of miracle and misery, in many ways very different from my own. But he’s also one of my greatest teachers, evidence of life rising from dust. And even through his muddy view, life is beautiful and new life, breathtaking. Perhaps therein lies our hope, the hope that our memory of resurrection’ll never fade and, when it inevitably does, that a greater hope’ll take its place. The hope that another resurrection’ll be there to show us the way, to make sure we remember *somebody* coming back from the dead. And it will be there, every year, every season every day. For you.

And so we continue to say, Alleluia. Christ is Risen!