

Echoes of Easter

Luke 24:36-48

Whitefish UMC

Third Sunday of Easter, April 26, 2009

† *I dreamed a dream in time gone by
When hope was high
And life worth living
I dreamed that love would never die
I dreamed that God would be forgiving
Then I was young and unafraid
And dreams were made and used and wasted
There was no ransom to be paid
No song unsung, no wine untasted.*

*But the tigers come at night
With their voices soft as thunder
As they tear your hope apart
And they turn your dream to shame.*

† So sings Fantine, a character in the wonderful musical, *Les Misérables*. Fantine has done all she can to live a life of integrity and responsibility, only to be condemned and cast out.

† Although written about a turbulent time in Victor Hugo's France, it's a song that could have been sung by one of the women who followed Jesus, only to see their dream shattered on the cross.

† But wait—haven't we already covered this story before? Wasn't Easter two Sundays ago? And yet Luke tells us this story about the

disciples hiding in the upper room because apparently they just couldn't believe it had really happened.

- † And so the question for us, today, is “Can we believe it’s really happened. And can we live as if and because it is so?” Yes, Easter has happened but it’s not just a one time event. The more we share the gift of Easter, the more it keeps on happening!
- † And so we’ll keep singing Easter songs and Alleluia’s for this whole season of Easter, just so we get the hang of resurrection life. Easter is meant to be the way we live. We are called to echo the alleluias of Easter with every day we are given.
- † My friend Peter Perry’s favorite Ziggy cartoon has Ziggy standing at the edge of the cliff next to a sign that reads “Echo Point.” Quite timidly, he softly says, “Echo...” And back comes the response, “Echo...” Encouraged, Ziggy raises his voice and shouts, “My name is Ziggy...” and he hears the echo, “My name is Ziggy...”
- † Now Ziggy shouts, “What is the meaning of life?” Back comes the response, “I’m not qualified to answer that question...”
- † Peter says, “Friends, on a Sunday morning long ago, in a graveyard outside the city of Jerusalem a shout was raised the likes of which had never been heard before. That early morning alleluia continues to reverberate throughout the world of God’s creation.
- † And contrary to Ziggy’s echo, as the world hears the echoing alleluias of Easter, the meaning of life does indeed become clearer. **We exist to proclaim Easter.** Our lives are meant to be living echoes of the first Easter.”
- † And what, we wonder, does that look, sound, and feel like?

- † By now many of you know that Tom and I spent a lot of time on the train, crossing over almost five thousand miles of the mid and western United States. I had my BlackBerry with me, and so I could keep track of emails and yes, Facebook notifications.
- † But towards the end of the trip, I kept finding references to a phenomenon: a woman named Susan Boyle who had dazzled the world with her vocal performance on a British show like American Idol.
- † I couldn't open the youtube video on the BlackBerry, so I didn't know what all the fuss was about. It wasn't until we returned home that I could experience what "everybody who wasn't living under a rock" already had seen: the performance of Susan Boyle.
- † In case you, too, have been living under a rock, here is a part of it....
click here: [**SUSAN BOYLE**](#)
- † Amazing, isn't it? And of course we could spend the rest of our time together talking about how unkind and cynical the audience and the judges were to snicker at Susan Boyle until they heard her voice. But that's not the point, at least this morning.
- † For a closer look a Susan Boyle reveals just how her life is one of those living echoes of Easter that my friend Peter talks about. The youngest of nine children, born with learning disabilities, Susan Boyle lives alone in a small village in Scotland.
- † Squarely built and never kissed, Susan took care of her ailing mother for years. she now lives in government subsidized housing, is unemployed but looking for work, and attends church faithfully. Susan is described by her parish priest as unassuming but willing to

- sing for church or any anniversary or birthday celebration for her friends.
- † But Susan entered the competition at the urging of her mother, who asked her to take the risk. On Easter Sunday, the day after her television debut, her congregation “gave her a wee bit of a cheer,” according to her priest. He also said that “she is a quiet soul who never flaunted her voice; this is the first time it’s been publicly recognized.”
 - † Yes, you could say that Susan Boyle is a living echo of the first Easter. For the words of the song that she sang in the competition—words that speak of dreams shattered and lost and of life a living hell—might have rung a little too true for comfort—had she not risked an Easter life instead.
 - † And yes, we all love a Cinderella story, don’t we? But what about the rest of us?
 - † New life, resurrection life, doesn’t come easily for most of us. We like to hang on to our old resentments, disappointments, and conflicts. In some ways, they even define us, establish our identity.
 - † I confess that that is sometimes true for me. You know that my family—mother, father and his new wife, sister and her partner, and niece Anya--all live in Chicago. My family has been defined by conflict for a long time—over religion, over money, over who is right and who is wrong, over who controls whom.
 - † So it was with some fear and trepidation that Tom and I boarded the train the morning after Easter Sunday for Chicago. After such a glorious Easter here in our church, we weren’t sure of the welcome

we would receive in Chicago. But everyone in the family wanted to risk reconciliation, so off we went into unknown territory.

- † What we did know was that cruel words had been spoken by each of us in the heat of anger, and prayers for forgiveness were in order. So on the train we prayed for the Holy Spirit to fill us and our family situation. We prayed to be able to be emptied of the resentments and anger and sadness and be filled with Spirit and new beginnings.
- † I wish I could tell you that everything went perfectly smoothly. It didn't. My mother was admitted to the hospital the day we arrived. There were times when the old wounds threatened to open.
- † But there were also times when we managed to bite our tongues and choke back unkind retorts. My sister and her partner are expecting twins this summer—a boy and a girl. We weren't sure whether we'd be included in their expanding family.
- † Yet I think the coming birth of these twins cast new light on our family. My sister planned a family dinner on Friday night that included my 89-year-old father and his wife. Anya asked if I would make my grilled salmon—the only fish she will eat—my sister doesn't eat fish either.
- † My sister wanted to record the family songs that my mother and father sang to us when we were little—songs I sang to our son and to Anya when I helped take care of her. My dad and I are the only ones who know the words to these songs—love songs from the 1940's mostly. My sister and her partner don't sing much.
- † But they want to play the songs for their twins, to carry on the family tradition. We were invited to consider the list of names they are

considering for the twins. Anya got to hear childhood stories of her mother, my sister Penny, who died six years ago.

- † That evening, that meal of fish and other good things, the family stories and the songs, the spirit of forgiveness and peace that pervaded that night are for me a re-enactment of the Easter story in Luke's gospel that we heard this morning.
- † Note that in Luke's gospel, the birth of new life on that first Easter doesn't happen all at once—it comes in stages—like a birth usually does. The birth will occur—not neatly, logically, or in straightforward fashion, but in messy waves of fear and pain, plateaus of waiting and spikes of recognition and joy that culminate in new life.
- † As Cynthia Gano Lindner writes in a beautiful meditation on today's passage for the *Christian Century*, “New life never slips in the back door quietly or painlessly. Every birth is only the beginning of a lifetime of these powerfully disorienting moments. So it is with this resurrection life.
- † The first disciples experienced Jesus' resurrection—and their own rebirth as a church—not as some single triumphant fait accompli, but by fits and starts, in hours of doubts and moments of exhilaration, with days of numbness and mourning punctuated by brief moments of holy presence and powerful certainty.
- † Their story is indeed good news for the spaces and places in our own world in which enduring evidence of the resurrection appears to be in short supply.”
- † And so, we become the echoes of Easter when we open ourselves to a stranger on a train or in the grocery store. When we sit at the bedside

of an elderly friend and hold their hand and listen to the same story we've heard many times. When we offer someone something to eat or the feast of forgiveness.

† “For we are all of us heirs to the resurrection—which is God’s affirmation that all of creation matters, that love and justice matter, that humanity, in all its ambiguity and complexity, is still fearfully and wonderfully God-made. We are evidence of Christ’s continuing in-breaking, of the resurrection which was and is and is to come.”
(Lindner)

† The risen Jesus enters our lives and turns us around, too, when we’re jaded and critical and judgmental and closed-off in heart and mind. If you were moved to tears when you heard Susan Boyle open her mouth and sing, let your tears flow, too, when you not only dream of and Easter life but become its living echo.

† May it be so. Amen.

Sources:

Rev. Peter Perry, “Echoing Alleluias” <http://www.sewardumc.com>

Kate Huey, “Weekly Seeds,” <http://i.ucc.org>

Cynthia Gano Lindner, “Living by the Word,” *Christian Century*, April 21, 2009, p. 20.