

HOMILY

You notice it the minute you get off the roller coaster..... or step off the gangplank after a long time at seaYou are now back on solid earth - the uncertainties of being upside down in the air or the unpredictable waves the sea are gone and you are back on predictable earth. We use the term 'grounded' to show that we are in a stable place emotionally and physically - a metaphor for having feet firmly planted in something that is solid.

Many years ago during a bible study in the home of a teacher colleague on a hillside in the Himalayan mountains - the bench I was sitting on began to shake. Looking up, annoyed, to see who was shaking the bench I caught the surprised expressions of everyone else in the room as we all realized we were in the middle of an earthquake. In that moment - I felt a sudden and stomach churning fear as I also knew there was nowhere to go that was secure - the very earth we depended on to be 'grounded' was shaking, the buildings we were in were not earthquake proof; we were on the side of a steep mountain and everything in my world was uncertain.

It was that stomach churning complete upending of certainties that Matthew wanted to signal in the gospel - both at the time Jesus' death on the cross when the earth shook and rocks split - and again here as the women came to the tomb and an earthquake greets them. For Matthew the radical, history changing events of the cross and the resurrection were

so momentous that they could only be described and accompanied by the very shaking of the one thing people thought was secure - the earth under their feet.

In both these moments God was doing something so profoundly dramatic that only an earthquake was sufficient to describe how destabilizing they would be. The outward appearance of the crucifixion was of a criminal killed because he was a threat to religious and political power., deemed a sinner. ...Instead the one on the cross is God's own self choosing to enter pain and death - not demanding it of us for sin but breaking its power by entering it willingly. Then God radically destabilizes the very certainty of death by raising Jesus in the resurrection. In the space of three days God breaks all assumptions and certainties - our assumption that the power of death is absolute is shattered by the possibilities the resurrection holds out. For if that is true - then nothing can or will ever be the same. If death is not the victor then there is hope for everything that Jesus taught and promised. If death is not the victor then love does fulfil the law; forgiveness is possible; new life is always available.

Is it any wonder that it would take forty days of appearances of the risen Christ before the disciples were able to fully accept and believe the evidence before them. We would hardly have been any quicker to believe this truth. They would need to go back over everything Jesus had said - and ask how to fit it into this new reality. Their expectations of a Messiah who would tackle Roman oppression had to be recalibrated into

something more far reaching - for all time and space....and eventually realizing it was for all people.

It is hard for us to capture the profound nature of Easter morning as we have grown up with it as a backdrop for our lives and calendars - as the ground of our lives - and not a radically new way of seeing all that we had expected. Maybe our current crisis is a new moment in which to grasp the power of Easter. For surely our expectations have been upended - the comforts of our lives have been disrupted by COVID 19 - the ground under our feet has been shaken by economic, social and physical uncertainties - including the threat of death - and we ask where is God? Where is Easter now?

The cross reminds us that God is always, willingly, in the very centre of the pain and suffering - sitting with those who are sick and dying when no family are permitted to be near; in the hearts and hands of all those who sacrificially go to work as medical personnel to face the risk of the virus each and every day for themselves and their families; in the midst of seniors facilities, prisons, jails and special needs homes where the risks are even higher for residents and staff; walking with essential workers face daily risks to provide food, transportation, daily needs; in the voices of all who cry for justice in prevention, protection and care as the virus spreads.

The power of the resurrection is in our midst too. For Easter is not something we are still waiting for but is here now - it is the yeast working

among us - the hope that knows that despite the pain and fear, there is a power stronger than even death. The power of the virus raises the fear of illness and death and can and has awakened in us selfishness; hoarding; and greed. The resurrection continues to work through the presence of God in our midst - the Spirit of Christ - that instead awakens deeper generosity; care for neighbour as self; - It is in the hearts and minds of those who in the face of suffering and pain give back life and hope. It is in the heart of a chef Giles in Meaford who is weekly making bread and meals for anyone in need ; it is in the hands of those bringing groceries to neighbours; it is in the spirit of generosity of those offering free concerts to soothe our spirits; it is in the Church finding new ways to connect with neighbours, parishioners and strangers; it is in the gestures of kindness, gentleness and grace all around us. And it is in the promise that new life is always possible - no matter how dark this moment may be for us - through the power of God bringing life out of death.

Earthquakes are destabilizing, upending moments of radical disruption to our lives. Sometimes they are devastating - destroying homes, lives, economies and communities. Sometimes their power overwhelms us with despair. And sometimes they are the sign that what is happening is radically transformative. Pay attention to the earthquakes for God is there in the midst of them entering into their destructive power and bringing life out of death.

Matthew knew that power and calls us to notice it now.

The Lord is Risen! The Lord is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!