

**April 1, 2018**

**EASTER**

**John 20: 1-18**

Prayer: Dear God, We rejoice to be in your presence on this blessed Easter morning. Help us to be the people of God you created us to be. We pray in the name you wore when you arose. Amen.

### **Monday Morning Resurrections**

A man named Harold made an appointment to see me this winter. The minute he walked into my office I remembered him.

He said he'd been clean for 10 years, and I remembered that's where I'd seen him – as an early participant in our Narcotics Anonymous meetings.

Then he reminded me of something else. Before that 10 years of sobriety, he had slept in the breezeway between the sanctuary and fellowship hall.

Before we got the iron gate keeps people from sleeping there, that breezeway was the bane of our existence. We'd arrive almost every Saturday and Sunday morning to find liquor bottles, crack pipes, urine and excrement. It was one of those ugly truths that I didn't tell partner churches when I was trying to raise support.

But Harold didn't come in to talk about that. That life was behind him. After getting sober, he had earned a degree in human services from Greenville Tech. He was working and helping his wife run four boarding houses.

Coincidentally, he visited at about the same time that the Economy Inn was shut down by the county. Several of the evicted residents were taken in by Nicholtown Baptist Church. When our parishioner Susan Stall read about it, she rushed over to Nicholtown and found a 74-year-old man sitting apart from everyone else. He was unwell and seemed to her unable to cope mentally or emotionally with what was happening.

So she took him on, and found him a place in Harold's wife's boarding house. Harold went with Susan to Place of Hope to help the man get a shower. And he got her friend settled in a safe place. He continues to check on him five days a week. Susan has been stunned by his kindness.

So was Harold's circle from homelessness to helping someone gain a home a coincidence?

Was his former sleeping 20 feet away from where Susan Stall sits on Sunday morning karma? What goes around comes around?

Or was it ... a Monday morning resurrection?

Today is Easter, which represents the big, extravagant, triumphant Sunday resurrection we've been singing about this morning. If that event was an earthquake in human history, a Monday morning resurrection is the aftershock.

It's what happens as the result of the Sunday resurrection. How our lives are rocked in the wake of the resurrection.

In Harold's case, Monday brought repentance, a turning away from an old life of addiction, and a turning toward a new life of service.

Nine years ago, a couple named John and Thomasina moved into the first house Triune ever purchased. They had come out of a house where the ceiling had fallen in. When they moved into the residence we co-own with Homes of Hope, they had lots of strikes against them.

They were in recovery, but John didn't drive. And he couldn't read, so he had no way to pass the written test to get a driver's license.

That didn't stop him from working. One of our board members at the time happened to own the construction company that was building the Kroc Center. He gave John a job. The site was near the house, so John rode a Moped to work, rain or shine.

A volunteer from this congregation began to work with him on his reading, and after many, many months of hard work, got him to the point that he could pass the written test for a driver's license.

Then a volunteer driving instructor took over and helped teach John the physical mechanics of driving. He failed the test a couple of times, but around Easter of 2011 he passed.

His employers on the construction site held a pizza party to celebrate and invited me and our associate director, Pat. The owner told us that the only way he could get John to take a lunch hour was if he brought in pizza. Otherwise, he'd never stop working.

When we arrived, everyone from the owner to the project manager to the secretary was there to celebrate John's accomplishment. And every one of them told us how hard he worked.

One man said every contractor who had been on the site told them that if they ever had to lay him off to please call them because they'd snap him up in a minute.

To this day, Pat and I go to John's house once a year for a fish fry or a birthday. And every time we're there, I think, *this man has undergone a Monday morning resurrection*. John's reclaimed life is the result of what happened on that first Easter.

So when people ask me what Triune does, I'm tempted to say, *Oh, we're in the resurrection business.*

Unfortunately, not for everyone. Not every time. But occasionally, little resurrections. Lives changed. Addictions ended. Brokenness healed. Reconciliation forged. Love restored.

Individuals reclaiming the lives they were meant to live.

Harold and John would be fitting stories for the gospel writer John because he's always talking in both reality and metaphor. I think he'd appreciate looking at their experiences alongside the experience of our Lord.

Because of course, that's our Scripture passage for today – the resurrection, the big one that happened on a Sunday.

**John 20: 1-18.**

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.'

Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the

tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.

Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.

Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?'

She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.'

When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?'

Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.'

Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher).

Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” ’

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

This passage opens with an almost farcical flurry of activity – running around and misunderstanding and confusion. If Moliere had written it, there would have been doors slamming in this cemetery.

Instead, there is Mary Magdalene *running* to tell Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved. Then *they run* to the tomb. One reaches it and looks in. Then Peter reaches it and looks in. Then the first one *goes* in. Then like Keystone Cops, they shrug and ... go home.

Thank goodness. For then we get to the truly lovely portion of this passage, the scene between Mary and the risen Jesus. The point where we see her sorrow turn to belief in this wild new thing that has happened, this thing that Jesus sort of told them about but that no human could comprehend.

Her friend rose from the dead. Now it’s up to her to share the news, the good news.

**“I have seen the Lord!”**

Last year I told you about running into my friend Stephen Clyborne in our parking lot right before our Easter service. Stephen is the pastor of our partner Earle Street Baptist, and he was walking alone from his sunrise service to Tommy’s Ham House for breakfast.

And he greeted me with these words: “He is risen!” Two thousand years later, the man was as exhilarated by the resurrection as Mary Magdalene was.

**“I have seen the Lord!”**

Clearly, her encounter with the historical resurrection wasn’t the end of it. For this was not an event confined by history or geography, by map or calendar or clock.

It was – and is -- an event -- that is re-created, re-lived, re-imagined, re-invigorated in everyone who accepts Jesus Christ as savior.

What happened to Mary happened to my friend Stephen. **“He is risen!”**

*What happened to Mary can happen to each of us.*

For if the Sunday resurrection changed the world, it gave way to Monday resurrections that change our lives.

Morgan was a heroin addict when we met her in 2015. She had been on drugs for 20 years, or half her life. She was jobless and homeless. Then she went to jail for four months. As sometimes happens, that wasn't a bad thing. It gave Morgan a chance to get sober, to clear her mind.

When she got out, she took two important steps. She returned to see our social worker Robin. And she got a job making biscuits at Tommy's next door. In fact, choir, that's who'll be making your biscuits in a few minutes.

Morgan attended NA meetings to help ensure her sobriety. But she was still only existing, she says, not planning for the future. So Robin and Cheri invited her into our Circles program. Some of the worshipers in this congregation "encircled" her.

For a year, she met every Monday night with those volunteers who quickly became her biggest friends and cheerleaders and supporters. They believed in her and gave her the confidence to believe in herself. They helped her write a budget and realize where her money was going.

During her Circles year, Morgan got her driver's license back, bought a car, purchased auto and health insurance, maintained her job and got into safe housing.

At her Circles graduation two weeks ago, Tommy sent over a beautiful flower arrangement. The card read "To the best biscuit maker in the world."

Here's what Morgan said that night: "The relationships I have developed with people at Triune I will hold dear to my heart forever. My life is better than I ever imagined it could be."

That's a resurrection, my friends.

Last week, BJ Oleson met me on the sidewalk as I came into work. I had watched BJ struggle for 12 years, moving from motel to place to place, to Kentucky and back, always struggling with addiction.

But on this day she quietly told me something else entirely. She'd been clean for a year – a lifetime record.

*May I tell that on Easter?* I asked her. "Oh, yes," she said. "I'd like that."

I know not everyone will want to do this, and that's okay. I respect anonymity. But if you're living in recovery and would *like* to acknowledge it, would you please stand?

That's a resurrection, my friends.

You know, when we replay a weekend football game, we call it Monday morning quarterbacking. (Not that I have ever, even once, done such a thing.)

When we replay the resurrection, when we internalize it, when we take it in, when we apply it, that's a Monday morning resurrection. How are we going to live our weekday lives in response to the Sunday resurrection?

Are we going to look at it as an interesting piece of history? A holiday weekend? Or are we going to live into it with Harold and John and Morgan and BJ?

Do you know that feeling when you've gotten really good news, and you wake up in the morning and thrill to it all over it again?

A marriage proposal. A promotion. A new baby or grandbaby on the way.

There's a split second when you don't remember, and then it floods over you with a warmth that suffuses your entire body. And you get to enjoy the news all over again.

What if the resurrection was that kind of news to us? Something that we awoke to every day with a shock and a thrill? I believe that we might look at life a little differently.

If we awoke every day to the realization that death had been conquered, the secret revealed, the end guaranteed, I believe we might look at life with more abandon. I believe we might look at life as more abundant. Isn't that exactly what Jesus promised us over and over in John's gospel?

**“I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10)**

**“The water that I give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” (John 4: 14)**

A life lived through the prism of the resurrection looks abundant, overflowing, joyful, adventurous.

A life lived through the prism of the resurrection looks like Harold buying more boarding houses.

Like John driving a car to his job.

Like Morgan baking biscuits.

Like BJ celebrating sobriety.

A life lived through the prism of the resurrection looks like glorious possibilities -- on Monday morning and every other day.

Amen.