

"Throw Stars"
Reverend Dave Franks

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Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021

Happy Easter! Happy Days of Spring! Happy renewal of the earth and all those creatures, human and alike, and not so alike for which we feel ourselves blessed and life continues to hold promise for new beginnings. As in our hymn today, Lo, the Earth awakes again from winter's bond and pain bring we leaf and flower spray to adorn this happy day. It's all good. Indeed it is on this day that we may remember that life is good. It's as good as the poem written by an American black preacher by the name of James Wisdon Johnson proclaims it was in that first day the world came into being.

God stepped out on space,
And he looked around and said;
I'm lonely –
I'll make me a world.

And as far as the eye of God could see
Darkness covered everything
Blacker than a hundred midnights
Down in a cypress swamp.

Then God smiled
And the light broke,
And the darkness rolled upon one side
And the light stood shining on the other
And God said: that's good!

Then God reached out and took the light
In his hands
And God rolled the light around in his hands
Until he made the sun.
And he set that sun a blazing in the heavens.

And the light that was left from making
The sun
God gathered it up in a shining ball
And flung it against the darkness
Spangling the night with moon and stars.
Then down between the darkness and the light
He hurled the world'
And God said: That's good.

Down in between the darkness and the light,
That world in Johnson's poem, is where we most often live.
It is from where Easter rises.

In midst of this beautiful Spring day, here in Pinellas County, Florida we feel light and love, of hope and healing, of life's renewal as evidenced in the colors and lengthening light of Spring. I confess; however, for the first time preparing an Easter sermon I wondered how Easter day is preached in the southern hemisphere of this world that was hurled down between darkness and light. It's not Spring in Auckland, New Zealand, or Sydney, Australia today. It's Fall and they will be approaching Winter next in their cycle of the seasons. Life seen in nature isn't springing forth and blossoming with renewal and the good fragrances of hope and resurrected beauty. There, life is entering a time of dormancy and hibernation, a time of behind the stone rather than experiencing the stone rolled away as Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Solo'me did as told in the Christian story of Easter.

I believe, and invite you to consider this morning, as I suggested from preacher Johnson's poem, we most often live our lives in this world somewhere between the darkness, as black as midnight in a cypress swamp, and the light of a brilliant shining ball against the sky, between aloneness and community, between a covid pandemic and a small gathering with friends with no masks. We cherish those family and friends that bring light and love into our lives while those who have been lost to us in death give us question as to the possibility of their being no being at the end of our days.

We have all lived, in a sense, in the Fall of New Zealand and Australia on Easter, wondering when or how the stone will be rolled away. Easter has questions, not easy answers. On this Easter morning, whether you're living in Florida or in New Zealand, the question is one of asking, not unlike those two women in Mark's story of Easter, who will roll away the stone we're behind, who will fling light against any darkness that enshrouds our waking or sleeping moments. Who or what will bring me hope in my helplessness, of not being fully in control of every moment of my days? Who or what will dispel my grief with a promise that I will get through, not over, my loss?

These are the questions of Easter. There is a certain element of life and of the Holy in them, as assuredly as there is in the life that awaits within the casing of a seed. They are the sort of questions that will not ultimately wait. They ask when will justice flow like a mighty stream for people of color once enslaved and reparations finally be paid. They are questions that ask if there is any real value that can arise out of one's suffering. Are we made of something more than flesh and bone, but on the universe and the soul? We do not require any empirical answer or proof to such questions, but we do want something to go on. Easter brings out of the tomb, to surface not only our questions of ultimate concern, as Paul Tillich would call them, but gives us something to go.

Easter beckons us, as we do every year on this day, to remember. That's it. Remember. For those who relate in some mysterious way with the Christian promise of this day, remember, the tomb is empty. No death to be found there. For those who do not relate to that remembrance, do remember that even when the soil covers the seed buried in earth new life will shoot forth to break through to the light of day, and in so doing nourish the world.

When the world calls for a gnashing of teeth and the renting of garments, we, remembering the promise of our values and principles meet such calls with shouts of Hallelujahs and hugs all around. When what would normally be a storm moving over our inner landscapes, we remember that we have been met with an inner peace and calm in the ways others reached out to us and, we in turn doing so for others. Those moments are gifts. They are given to us in those moments

when all we have is the ability, like those early disciples of the teacher they came to love and became followers of his way, is to remember. Tell of the time, tell the story again, if not to someone else then to yourself, when your heart strangely burned within you and what had been a moment, an hour, a night, feeling as dark as a hundred nights down in a cypress swamp was met with light that broke through that darkness and life got better and you had reason again to live.

Yes, Easter is the act of remembering. It's not a passive act. It is one that makes us new persons, again, and if, and when need be, again! It is what promises to change a world cast down between darkness and light. This is a day Anne Dillard might describe as, "...madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return."

Easter people, beloved community that holds dear to its values and principles shout hallelujahs that you may be drawn out to where you can never return. Roll away that stone for those who live in poverty, discrimination, depression, and anger for whom behind that stone they live a living death. It is not an easy act to remember what this day is about. This is no Sunday for eggs dyed in pale blues and pink. Oh No! This is a day we set ourselves against an arching rainbow as Loren Eiseley, a gifted anthropologist and master of the metaphor describes such a moment of accepting the gift of taking action to remember. He had placed himself in a kind of self-exile on the Island of Costabel. Life seemed to him to be meaningless, void of purpose. He had studied humanity's origins and came to despair over the direction humanity was heading. His own life seemed to turn and turn.

He writes,

"Certain coasts are set apart of shipwreck. With unerring persistence I had made my way thither."

Just when Eisley was ready to give into his despair, his helplessness in face of the world, he saw a man as he walked along the coast of an endless, wave beaten beach. The man's silhouette was cast against an arching rainbow. Eisley noticed the man picking up a starfish that had been washed upon the beach by the pounding surf and hurling it back into the sea. The man then picked up another and another doing the same to each, hurling it back out over the waves into the sea. Eisley call the man he saw on that early morning dawn, silhouette against the arching rainbow, the Star Thrower.

He remembers, "We were part of the rainbow. As I went down the beach, I could feel the drawing of a circle in men's minds, like that lowering, shifting realm of color in which the thrower labored. It was a visible model of something toward which man's mind had striven, the circle of perfection. "

"I picked up and flung a star. Perhaps far outward on the rim of space a genuine star was similarly seized and flung. I could feel the movement in my body. It was like a sowing – the sowing of life on an infinitely gigantic scale. I looked back across my shoulder. Small and dark against the receding shadow, the Star Thrower stooped and flung once more. I never looked again. The task we had assumed was too immense for gazing. I flung and flung again while all about us roared the insatiable waters of death."

"But we, pale and alone and small in that immensity, hurled back the living stars. Somewhere far off, across bottomless abysses, I felt as though another world was flung more joyfully. I could have thrown in a frenzy of joy, but I set my shoulders and cast, as the thrower in the rainbow cast – slowly, deliberately, and well. The task was not to be assumed lightly, for it was men as well as starfish that we sought to save."

"I cast again with an increasingly remembered sowing motion and went my lone way up the beach. Somewhere, I felt, in a great surge of feeling, somewhere the Thrower knew. Perhaps he smiled and cast once more into the boundless pit of darkness. Perhaps, he too, was lonely, and the end toward which he labored remained hidden – even as with ourselves."

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"Somewhere, my thought persisted, there is a hurler of stars, and he walks, because he chooses, always in desolation, but not in defeat."

On this Easter morn, ours is not to wish upon that star but to pick it up and hurl it where there is darkness, across the insatiable waters of death, of injustice, of pain, and sorrow. I trust we are made of that stuff that makes a thrower of stars. Throw stars. And as we pick and fling a star against the darkness, far outward on the rim of space a genuine star is similarly flung, a sowing of life on an infinitely gigantic scale.

Shalom, Blessed Be, Namaste, and Amen. Happy Easter.