

A medieval Christian priest once observed, “God is like a person who clears his throat while hiding in order to give himself away.” That’s a great image for parents and grandparents who know that children always seem give themselves away with giggle fits and squirming as they “hide” underneath bedcovers.

There are, of course, any number of doubt plagued people who wish God would clear his throat more often and more obviously. We who preach on Sundays are among that number! It would assist us greatly if God would clear his throat more audibly from time-to-time.

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As we celebrate the Resurrection this morning, the Gospel of Matthew tells us that on the third day following Jesus’ death, God is anything but subtle. Easter is not God’s sly cough at the right time. Easter is a crash of thunder.

The Rev. Peter Gomes writes, “...there is nothing subtle about Easter, nothing vague or ambiguous or vain or clever or cute... The resurrection is God’s way of getting our attention. It is God’s way of making us listen up, God’s way of getting us to look, to listen, and **to live.**” Easter is confrontational; it hit’s us in the face... for our Christian faith began not with a whimper or an argument. It began with a bang.¹

Dorothy Sayers, a contemporary of both J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, wrote this: “To make of this [resurrection] story something that could neither startle, nor shock, nor terrify, nor excite, nor inspire...is to **crucify** the Son of God afresh.”

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As Matthew tells it, the Resurrection did shock and terrify... There’s an earthquake, and an angel, and an uncovered tomb. Four times in 10 verses, we hear the word “afraid.” 1.) v. 4 tells us that the guards were so afraid that they shook and became like dead men. (Matthew’s phrasing is clever. It’s the guards, not Jesus, who belong in the tomb because they are dead even while alive!) 2.) In v. 5 the angel – whose appearance was like lightning – tells the women, “Do not be afraid.” 3.) None-the-less, the women do scurry away very much “afraid.” (Excited yes, but afraid.) 4.) And in v. 10 the risen Jesus greets these same

women repeating the words they’ve already heard from the angel: “Do not be afraid.” (And don’t we think the Risen Lord is asking a little much of them given these circumstances?)

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But there’s a tension here... On the one hand the Resurrection unsettling, and we ought not downplay this reality in an attempt to appeal to rational sensibilities. Given the way the world operates, the Resurrection is an absurd story that can only be affirmed by those foolhardy enough to believe that there might, could, ought to be, more to life... than death.

On the other hand, we have these words of the angel and of Jesus spoken to quell our anxiety; to assure us that the empty tomb and a risen corpse ought not scare us stiff. And it is precisely in this tension where the wonderful good news of Easter comes to life – the startling, shocking, terrifying news that ***we need not be afraid***; that we need not structure our day-to-day lives around our fears, our doubts, and our insecurities, which is precisely what we are most likely to do.

We are horribly afraid, most of us... We fear terrorist attacks, global warming, illegal immigrants, economic downturns, hordes of Pokemon-Go players on Orange Ave... Students fear that they won’t get into the right college, parents fear college tuition costs, grandparents fear that they’ll end up in a nursing home, and a host of other worries. It is not that these worries are not valid! It’s just that we miss out on the life God wants us to live when we shape our living around these fears.

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That marvelous song “In Christ Alone” includes the lyrics, “No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me.” But Matthew’s is even more bold. His lyrics are, “No dread of death, **no fear in life**, this is the power of Christ in me.”

This is the power of the risen Christ Matthew invites us to take hold of: that life begins when disciples realize that in overcoming death, Christ gives us full possession of our lives. This what it meant for the first disciples after the met their resurrected Lord. “It wasn’t how long they would

now live after Easter [or the promise of heaven beyond their death]; it was how the disciples were empowered and transformed by their risen Lord **to live** [to really come alive and live]. Life began for the earliest disciples when they stopped being afraid – afraid both of what they did know and what they did not know and what they couldn't quite understand and what they couldn't really explain.²

Jesus carried the cross not because he was fearless in the face of death. (He agonized in the Garden of Gethsemane). No, Jesus went to the cross to show us that life need not be constricted by our fear of death – or anything else. In Christ, God initiated and proved that Jesus way of living before death was really the way to life!

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In Romans 8:38-39, the apostle Paul writes, "For I am convinced that neither death, **nor life**... will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Why does he mention 'life' as something that could separate us from God's love? Because Paul recognizes that while many us are terrified by the prospect of death, there are just as many – if not more of us – for whom life is even more terrifying.

And sadly, it's many Christians who find life to terrifying to live! The litany of evil and despair and danger that blankets the news so overwhelms us that we retreat from the world. The hope of heaven, the after-life, becomes our sole focus. But to limit the power of Resurrection to the afterlife is far cry from the redeemed life, the abundant life, the full life, for which God grace seeks to liberate us. A more robust message of the Resurrection is the announcement that we do not have to die before living in God's way. Resurrection affirms that, like Jesus, you can live fully and completely while you're still alive.

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One of my favorite jokes is about a priest who goes into a Dublin bar and approaches the first man he sees. "Do you want to go to Heaven, son?" he asks. The man says, "Indeed I do,

Father." "Then for God's sake," commands the priest, "leave this pub right now."

The priest goes to the next man, "Do you want to go to Heaven, my son?" And the man answers, "Yes Father, indeed I do." "Then you must get out of this bar right now!"

The priest continues through the pub until he comes to the last man. "Do you want to go to Heaven?" asks the priest. The man looks at his half-full mug, turns to the priest and says, "No, Father, I don't." The priest is dumfounded, "You mean to tell me, young man, that when you die, you don't want to go to Heaven?" The man responds, "Oh. Oh, yes, when I die, yes Father, I certainly do. I just thought you were gathering a group to go right now!"

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In raising Jesus from death to life, the good news is that life is worth living now, here, in all of its fullness, in all of its amplitude. Resurrection is God's promise that life can triumph over death even before we die. Brothers and sisters, don't let anything, not even the promise of heaven, compromise the FULL gift of life, given us in Christ's resurrection.

Don't play hide-n-seek from underneath your covers. Jesus lives, so that we too, may live. Resurrection happens when we discover that God has freed us for life!³

Alleluia, Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed.

¹ Gomes, Peter. 73

² *ibid.* 76

³ *ibid.* 77-78