

**“An Easter Perspective”**  
**Luke 24:1-11**  
**Easter Morning**  
**March 23, 2008**

“Life gets harder and harder; but, life gets better and better.”<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Gordon Cosby, founder of the Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C., once used that phrase to describe his understanding of life to a group of children. Do you agree with it? Listen again. “Life gets harder and harder; but, life gets better and better.” I am not so sure what that particular group of children thought about their pastor’s assessment of life, but I think I have a pretty good idea of what some of you may be thinking.

There are probably quite a few of you who agree with the first part of that statement. Life does seem to get harder and harder. Maybe it is just my age, but it seems to me as if things today are just a little more difficult than they were yesterday, that this year is just a bit tougher than last. Life seems to be getting more difficult all the time. I am finding, for instance, that it is a whole lot harder to be a father to a 10-year-old at 55 than it was at 37. Tasks that used to be relatively easy back then are so much more difficult now. And that is true with some of my other daily tasks as well. It is the same for most of us. Whether it is our job, our marriage, or our health, life tends to get more complicated. With every passing day the first part of Dr. Cosby’s assessment rings true; “Life does seem to get harder and harder.”

But what about that second part? Does life get better and better? How can that be true when a presidential campaign that lasts far too long, an economy that teeters on the brink of recession, and a war that seems to have no good ending constantly cloud our horizon? How can that be true when our hair is falling out, our weight is going up, and gravity is pulling everything else down? Based on our common experience, life does not get better and better. It gets harder and harder. Period. As our family increases, so do our responsibilities. As our business grows, so do its headaches. Perhaps Dr. Cosby lived in a

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<sup>1</sup> John R. Claypool, “The Easter Perspective,” The Gift of Easter, Word Books, Waco, 1976, p. 52

different world than we do. Perhaps Dr. Cosby spent too much time with those children. Or perhaps Dr. Cosby came to grips with that all-important message of Easter.

“Life gets harder and harder: but, life gets better and better.”

That is not just Dr. Cosby’s personal assessment of life, you see; that is the good news that this Easter morning boldly proclaims. It is that which this March day is really all about. Yes, it is a message that seems to run contrary to everything we encounter from day to day. Yes, it is a message that even some committed Christians have a hard time accepting. Yet it is the good news just the same. And if you permit it to grab hold of your life this morning, if you let the truth of that news sink deeply into your heart, if you allow the power of the risen Christ into your life, you will never again be the same. Let me show you what I mean.

“Life gets harder and harder.” That just about sums up Peter’s take on the situation in which he found himself on that first day of the week. Defeated and ashamed, he sat with the other one-time disciples of Jesus behind the locked doors of that upper room. Memories of the past three days washed over him. He had denied and abandoned the one to whom he had sworn he would never deny or abandon. Three times he had turned his back on his friend when he needed him the most. All he and the others could do was to watch the events of Friday “from a distance”—the gospel writer’s way of saying that they were just too scared to get any closer. The world upon which this disciple had counted had collapsed. His hopes, his dreams, and even his faith now seemed as insubstantial as the morning mist. Along with the others, Peter sat in embarrassed silence.

And then came that knock on the door. Startled and somewhat afraid, that former fisherman cautiously moved forward and slowly removed the heavy crossbar. The frantic women nearly knocked the door off the hinges as they exploded into that room. They all started talking at once, all trying to tell the same story, all speaking of empty tombs, discarded grave clothes, and men dressed in dazzling white. Peter listened closely and

tried hard to make sense of their words, but soon dismissed them as utter nonsense. An idle tale, as Luke put it. Nothing more than the wild ramblings of overly emotional women. The disciple, with images of that bloody cross still fresh on his mind, was unable to move beyond his grief and despair. Imprisoned in his Good Friday world, the women's perceived foolishness only added to the sense of desperateness he felt.

“Life gets harder and harder.” How many of us feel just like Peter? How many of us are locked into a Good Friday world? Existence, it seems, has reached the point of futility. Every passing day brings more and more frustration. Perhaps it is a rocky relationship, a business failure, a disappointment over a son or daughter's lifestyle, or a death of a loved one that has left us broken. Maybe it is a personal failure or a difficult addiction that has caused great upheaval in our lives. Whatever the case may be, we seem to be stuck at the bottom of a deep hole and cannot find a way to pull ourselves out. Oh, we want to believe. We would like to think that things could get better. Please note that Peter, much to his credit, did go to the tomb. He walked in, looked around, and then walked away “amazed at what had happened.” Yet nothing changed. He grief still prevailed. As much as he may have wanted to believe what the scene implied, his experience taught him that things like that just don't happen. Despite what he saw, it was still an idle tale. And life was not going to get any better.

The other night I opened the newspaper and read how the murder of that 11-year-old boy and his parent's housekeeper has changed that Dundee neighborhood in which it happened. There was a story that the number of gang members is up in Omaha. Racist bullies were reported to be present at Westside High School. Despite the date on the calendar, the forecast said that March would still be roaring like a lion. And ticket prices for the basketball games down at the Quest Center were way out of reach for the average Methodist pastor. As Ella began to watch Hanna Montana for the umpteenth time that day, I found myself gravitating to the first part of Dr. Cosby's assessment. Life really does get harder and harder. I understood why so many people are stuck in lives of despair. In a world where each day seems to bring more bad news than the last, in a world where our money is worth less and less every day, in a world that is more than willing to

turn its back on the truth, it is hard to hold onto hope. The music and the flowers of this day give us a brief respite from the dreariness of our days, but in the end they are nothing more than an intrusion into the despair of our lives. The realities of our Good Friday existence relegate any hint of that Easter promise to that disheartening category of an idle tale.

And yet, “Life gets better and better.” That was the remarkable discovery of the women in the garden. Something happened to them that morning, something that totally rearranged their lives. Luke wrote that after their experience, “they remembered his words.” Now you may have noticed that Luke did not say that they understood his words. They did not have it all figured out by any stretch of the imagination. And their lives were far from being uncomplicated. But they remembered. They found something in Jesus’ words, something that was backed up by their shared experience early that morning, which gave them a whole new outlook on life. They emerged from that garden with new hope for the living of each day of their lives. The women left the darkness of their Good Friday world behind them and walked into the dazzling brilliance of Easter.

What of Peter? Luke does not record the account of this disciple’s encounter with the risen Christ. We are not told when or where or even what happened, but it is more than obvious that something did. Easter was the turning point in his life as well as the others. Garry Wills, a Pulitzer Prize winning historian, wrote about that turning point: “These Christians were not expecting the Resurrection. They did not believe it, even when the women first announced it to them. They had, remember, all scattered and hidden as Jesus was condemned and executed. They were too timorous to go to the tomb, like the women, who also had no expectation that the body would not be there for them to anoint. Yet this band of cowards was suddenly changed into an energetic body of effective evangelists, spreading the faith, [and] firmly offering the claim that Jesus lives.”<sup>2</sup> Peter, just like his fellow disciples, was changed. Now that does not mean that his life became easy. That does not mean that he no longer faced problems. His numerous arrests, beatings, and imprisonments are evidence of that. Like the others, however, he

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<sup>2</sup> Garry Wills, What Jesus Meant, Penguin Books, New York, 2006, p. 126

did find a power for living that he never knew existed before. He moved from the hopelessness of the crucifixion to the confidence of the resurrection. Nothing in his life was ever the same.

And what of you? “Life gets harder and harder; but, life gets better and better.” If you understand the whole of that statement, then you will realize that Easter is not just the remembering of a story that happened in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, but the rediscovering of a hope that is available in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. “Life gets harder and harder; but, life gets better and better.” If you grasp all of Dr. Cosby’s assessment, then you will understand that the promise of Easter is not just a future joy, but a present power as well. “Life gets harder and harder; but, life gets better and better.” If you know the truth of that statement, then you will discover that the business-as-usual world that worked so hard to nail the carpenter of Nazareth to that bloody cross no longer has the last word. Easter promises a power for life that cannot be defeated. Easter promises a presence in life that cannot be dismissed. And it is that power and that presence that can make all the difference in the way you live every day of your life. It is a power and a presence that can take your Good Friday world and turn it upside down. Those of us who have experienced the good news, who understand that Christ is risen, can gladly affirm that, despite getting harder and harder, life just keeps getting better and better.

Karl Barth was one of the great Christian thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In a sermon on the resurrection, he expressed frustration at the kind of preaching that is heard so often on Easter morning. You know the kind: something is said about Easter that includes the rejuvenation of nature, or the romantic reappearing of blossoms, or the revival of the once frozen meadows. The message that Jesus is victor is not interpreted in the literal sense, but as a symbol or a human idea. Barth says doing so says that the world is really not so bad. After each and all evils, after the hard knocks of life, there naturally follows something good—just as spring always follows winter. Therefore, just have patience.

But Barth was not satisfied with that kind of preaching. As one who stood firmly against Hitler and the Nazis, he knew that life is not easy, and that there exists little hope

that it ever will be easy. So Barth proclaimed, “We may be satisfied with this sort of resurrection. We may get along very well for some time with the comfort that death is not so terrible... We may be satisfied for a long time with the romantic reappearing of the blossoms of...spring, and thus forget the bitterness of present reality...But the remarkable thing about the real truth of the resurrection seems to be too strong for us, because it will not suffer itself to be hidden or concealed in these harmless clothes. It always breaks forth; it rises up and shouts at us, asking: ‘Do you really think that is all I have to say to you? Do you really believe that this is why Jesus came to earth, why he agonized and suffered, why he was crucified and rose again on the third day, to become merely a symbol for the truth—that really is no truth—that eventually everything will be all right?’”<sup>3</sup>

Barth was right on the mark. We’re not here this morning to remember that, “the darkest moment always comes before the dawn.” We’re here this morning to affirm that life really is tough, that it has plans to knock you down and never let you up, that it just keeps getting harder and harder. But because today is Easter, because we unashamedly proclaim that “Christ the Lord is risen today,” we know that the power and presence of the risen Christ allows us to rise above this difficult life. And because that is so, even though it may get harder and harder, life gets better and better. That is why we can join with the hymnist and say:

*The strife is o’er,  
the battle done;  
the victory of life is won;  
the song of triumph has begun:  
Alleluia!*

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<sup>3</sup> Karl Barth, “Threatened by Resurrection,” Bread and Wine: Readings for Lent and Easter, Plough Publishing, Farmington, PA, 2003, p. 301-2