

A Easter 2017

Honestly, when I woke up today, I didn't feel much like dancing.

That 7:00 AM service seems to arrive earlier and earlier every year. I am not a morning person to begin with, but to climb out of the warm bed covers, in the wee hours of the morning, is always a challenge.

And yet, there is something about the promise of dawn that pulls me out of bed, in spite of myself.

There is something deeply moving about watching the sun rise over the horizon.

An early morning stillness, a bit of time with a cup of coffee in hand to watch and wait for the first ray of light to peak above the trees.

Always beautiful, (Even on a cloudy day.)

The world is a different place when the sun has risen.

The light of the sun pushes back the darkness.

What were shadows and hazy shapes in the pre-dawn moments, become trees and bushes, filled with life, some green and lush, some supporting buds ready to burst into leaves and blooms.

As the sun rises, God's creatures come to life, scurrying for food and building shelters and nests.

The chill and dampness dissipates as the darkness retreats and the glorious gift of a brand new day stands ready to be received.

On that first Easter morning, Mary Magdalena also rose from her bed before dawn.

She didn't feel much like dancing either.

Her heart was heavy with grief and despair.

Her teacher and friend, Jesus of Nazareth, had been crucified and buried.

There was nothing she could do to bring him back, but, perhaps, spending some time at the tomb would bring her a bit of comfort.

So she joined the other Mary and together they traveled to where Jesus lay.

In the last moments of darkness, when night could no longer hold back the light of day, there was a great rumbling, and the earth shook and leaves danced on their branches. It was an earthquake.

The women saw that the stone had been rolled back from her Lord's tomb.

The rhythm of their hearts quickened.

Their feet sped to the entrance.

They bent their backs low to see into the cave.

And as the sun rose over the Mount of Olives, the bright rays turned the chamber's darkness to brilliant light.

The women saw that the tomb was empty.

An angel announced: *Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.*

And the dance of Easter begins!

Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, running to tell and eventually the disciples, jumping- up, running, turning, returning...a great dance of life, sprung from death!

What a morning it must have been, as it slowly dawned on the witnesses to the empty tomb, death has been conquered.

On Easter, Jesus is the Lord of the Dance.

In the ancient translation from the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, the Hebrew word for “*dance*” becomes a Greek word that can mean both “*dance*” or “*life*.”

So Jesus, the Lord of *Life*, is also be understood as Jesus, the Lord of the *Dance*.

Our Lenten theme this year was: Stumbling in the dark;
Dancing in the light.

As Christians, as people of faith, we are invited to step out of the darkness and dance in the light.

Now I know that we probably have many here today, who would say, “Wait! No! I can’t dance. I am a toe tapper... maybe, but I cannot dance!”

And I say, everyone can dance.

Years ago, I took a high school group on a mission trip to Bethphage Village in Axtell, Nebraska.

Bethphage is a Lutheran sponsored community, almost like a little town for adults who have intellectual disabilities. On campus they have a retreat house for any group which wishes to have first-hand experiences with people who have disabilities.

The door to the retreat center didn’t have a lock and the residents of Bethphage could stop by and see us at any time.

They were used to this freedom and we quickly learned that we were their guests. They took their job of hosting quite seriously and we had a steady flow of people with intellectual disabilities stopping by and “teaching” us. All weekend they joined in, with whatever I had planned, bible studies, games, meals. It was great. Lots of laughter.

On Sat. we were invited to their weekly dance.

There was a disk jockey, food, decorations, and everyone, I mean everyone was expected to dance. And dance we did! Our Bethphage partners taught us how. Though some had Downs syndrome, or brain injuries, others were in wheelchairs or leaned on crutches, we twisted and twirled the night away.

No one sat on the sidelines. It was certainly a God moment.

The next morning we got up early and drove back to Colorado. We arrived at our home church, just in time for the stewardship banquet. After the meal, one of our high school youth got up, to report to the congregation about our trip and she concluded by saying “*We went expecting to be sad about what we experienced at Bethphage, that the residences there wouldn’t have much of a life because of all the things they can’t do, but we discovered that we were the ones who were limited. They taught us many things, like how to hold a fork with two fingers. They taught us joy. They even taught us to dance.*”

So maybe you can’t dance like this,

Or this

Or even this.

But everyone, and I mean everyone is invited to feel the rhythm and find the beat, because today, on Easter we celebrate that long ago, in Jerusalem, and today, in the midst of all these spring flowers and lilies, and tomorrow, wherever life takes us, **And the dance goes on.**

The Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was a defining and transforming moment for all humanity, throughout all time.

In the death and resurrection, God's kingdom is breaking through and transforming our lives.

A community gathers around the table to share bread and wine in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. **And the dance goes on**

A family is brought to the waters of Baptism. **And the dance goes on.**

A friend offers a listening ear and a comforting word. **And the dance goes on.**

A wife forgives her husband. A teenager forgives his mother. **And the dance goes on.**

A child speaks a word of truth that others could not or would not. **And the dance goes on.**

A worshipping community chooses to work for the good of others. **The dance goes on.**

A cruel government allows itself to be transformed. **The dance goes on.**

A lonely man finds friendship, meaning and purpose in his congregation. **The dance goes on.**

Once a year we fill our sanctuary with Easter flowers but all year long, wherever we experience new life in Jesus Christ, **And the dance goes on.**

Christ, the Lord of the dance, is risen.
Christ is risen indeed.
Alleluia.

This is the good news of Easter.
This is the good news of the gospel.