

An Easter Sermon

# Poking Holes in the Darkness

Kenneth Carter

This Sermon was taken from Matthew 28:1-10 and Psalm 30 and preached on Easter Sunday (March 31, 2002) at Mount Tabor United Methodist Church, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

On Friday evening of Easter weekend, March 29, 2002, three young boys in our congregation were killed in a car accident: Wesley Burton, Andy Burton and Ryan Shoaf. These two families are greatly loved by many in the church, and the experience was a powerful undercurrent in everything that was said and left unsaid. The gathered congregation on this morning was in the midst of its own initial shock in the grief of these three deaths. The scripture had been chosen weeks before, although the sermon was re-written in light of the weekend.

*Weeping may linger for the night,  
but joy comes in the morning.*

I want you to keep that scripture in your heart, in your consciousness, for the next few minutes. It has everything to do with how we approach life. It has everything to do with how we celebrate Easter. It has everything to do with how we make it through the next few days.

*Weeping may linger for the night,  
but joy comes in the morning.*

The women go to the tomb. It is the first day, or the eighth day. It is dawn, the sun in the sky is emerging. It was an act of faith to be there. Some of the disciples had simply headed back home, to Emmaus and other places. They had given up, thrown in the towel.

In the light of this new day, there were surprises: the tomb was not closed, but open. They discovered not Jesus but a mysterious messenger. When they did see Jesus, he was not dead. He was alive.

When they met Jesus, he was still the crucified one. Resurrection is not the denial of crucifixion. Resurrection

takes crucifixion and casts it in a new light. On Easter there is great hope for us, but hope and grief are always bound together—you know what I mean. Especially, this weekend, you know what I mean.

Leonard Bernstein wrote his *Mass* in memory of President John F. Kennedy. Toward the end of the musical the priest, who is arrayed in elaborate and colorful vestments, is lifted onto the shoulders of the people, in the form of a human pyramid. The crowd adores him, and he holds in his hand the glass communion chalice. Suddenly the human pyramid collapses, and the priest falls all the way down. His clothing is torn apart, and the glass chalice falls on the ground. As he walks through the crowd of people, he is wearing only a t-shirt and blue jeans. The children sing to him, "Praise, praise, praise." And then the priest notices the broken chalice. There is a silence. He looks for a long moment and then comments: "I never knew that broken glass could shine so brightly!"

On Easter, grief and hope are always bound together.

*Weeping may linger for the night,  
but joy comes in the morning.*

The beauty of the body of Christ, even the risen Body of

Christ, is in its brokenness. In the morning, when it is Easter, we see, through the eyes of faith, that the broken glass can shine brightly.

I mentioned last Sunday that Holy Week is a struggle. The last chapters of each of the gospels describe the struggles. They had to do with betrayal and fear. They had to do with disappointment and confusion. They had to do with uncertainty and finally, despair. The struggles we encounter in Holy Week are the same struggles we know in this life's journey. Betrayal. Fear. Disappointment. Confusion. Uncertainty. Despair.

Jesus had been a master teacher, a compassionate healer. But then the latter chapters of the gospels tell the story of his struggle. It is told in great detail, and with utter honesty. When the writer of the 30th Psalm described what life with God was like, he captured it perfectly: weeping may linger for a night. The good news is that Holy Week passes through the struggle, and ends up in a place that we could never have imagined:

*an empty tomb  
a Risen Lord.*

The good news is that the betrayal and fear, the disappointment and confusion, the uncertainty and despair are not the last word in our own lives. God has a few surprises for us too!

*Weeping may linger for the night,  
but joy comes in the morning.*

Robert Lewis Stevenson, author of *Treasure Island*, had a difficult childhood, due to ill health. One night the nurse found him up, out of bed, his nose pressed against the window. "Come here child," she said to him, "you'll catch your death of cold." But he wouldn't budge. Instead he sat, mesmerized, watching a lamplighter slowly working his way through the black night, lighting each street light along his route. Pointing to him, Robert said, "See, look there; there's a man poking holes in the darkness."

On this Easter, which feels so much like a Good Friday, we need someone to poke holes in our darkness. And that is resurrection, Easter resurrection, the resurrection of the body, which is at the core of our faith. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has poked holes in the darkness.

One of the reasons we gather, on a day like today, on an Easter which feels so much like a Good Friday, is that we are the body of Christ, the crucified and risen body of Christ. My friend Greg Jones of the Duke Divinity School experienced the death of his father at an untimely age, of a fatal heart attack. His father had given a lifetime of faithful service to God. Greg shared that when the memorial service took place, he could not sing the hymns, he could not say the creeds, his heart must have been full, his mind confused. But he also said that he was glad that there were other people there that day, who could sing the hymns for him, who could express their beliefs for him, until the time came when he could claim them as his own again.

I have been in the ministry long enough to know that there are Easter congregations. I love Easter congregations. But I

also know that the world has changed since last Easter. The world changed on September 11. In our congregation, for many, the world changed on Friday evening. And as you sit in the pews, you can probably recall a day in your own life when the world changed.

There is yet one word to add. The world changed, most importantly, on that first Easter, two thousand years ago, when God finally and decisively poked a hole in the darkness of our world, when God finally and decisively said to you and to me and to all who would hear,

*Weeping may linger for the night,  
but joy comes in the morning.*

It is an Easter that has the feel of a Good Friday. It is a resurrection that has the feel of a crucifixion. And it calls forth a faith that unites grief and hope, sorrow and gladness, tears and laughter.

*Weeping may linger for the night,  
but joy comes in the morning.*

Our ancestors in the faith named the three days we have been living.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and was buried—that was Friday.

He descended into hell—that was Saturday.

On the third day he rose from the dead—that is today. That is Easter.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and was buried. This we know. This we have seen.

He descended into hell. This we know. This we have seen.

But let us also confess the faith we believe.

As the first day was dawning, they went to see the tomb. And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. He has been raised."

Let us confess the faith we believe.

*Weeping may linger for the night,  
but joy comes in the morning.*

In God's timing, I believe that. And I want you to believe that too. *Amen.* □

Sources: *Life of The Beloved*, by Henri Nouwen. *Practicing Our Faith*, edited by Dorothy Bass; *Poking Holes in the Darkness* by Peter J. Flamming.



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