

**Sermon Preached April 5, 2015  
Year B, Easter Day – The third way  
St. John’s Episcopal Church  
Beverly Farms, Massachusetts  
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Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight,  
Oh Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

As a young boy enters a barber shop, the barber whispers to his customer, “This is the dumbest kid in the world. Watch while I prove it to you.” The barber puts a dollar bill in one hand and two quarters in the other, then calls the boy over and asks, “Which do you want, son?” The boy takes the quarters and leaves. “What did I tell you?” said the barber. “That kid never learns!” Later, when the customer leaves, he sees the same young boy coming out of the ice cream store. “Hey, son! May I ask you a question? Why did you take the quarters instead of the dollar bill?” The boy licked his cone and replied, “Because the day I take the dollar, the game is over!”

A common characteristic of good jokes is that you think you know where the story is going to take you, but then it doesn’t. It’s a surprise. You end up at an unexpected destination. That boy was not so foolish after all.

Life itself is not a straight line. We may make all the plans we want, but when life actually happens, it rarely turns out as we expect. We are often unhappy about this. I saw a great cartoon on Facebook a while back which had two frames. The first had the caption, “Your plans” which shows a stick figure contemplating a straight line from point A to point B. The second

frame had the caption, “what actually happens” with the stick figure contemplating instead a wildly squiggly line between points A and point B.

This is how the women at the tomb must have felt that first Easter morning. They, and all the disciples had a particular expectation for how the story of their messiah would turn out. Up until the week before they had expected that he would continue with his teaching and healing, and hopefully one day lead the Israelites out from under the oppression of the Roman Empire. Three days earlier they were horrified instead to see Jesus crucified. They knew that execution had been a risk, but they believed so fervently in what Jesus was doing, and what God was doing in Christ, that they couldn't entertain such a possibility, until it actually happened. Now it is three days later. The straight path they had envisioned for Jesus and his message, had not only gotten tangled, it had ended. It never even made it to point B.

But then the unexpected kicks in and the story flips, like a good joke, and on Easter morning the women discover that Jesus has risen from the grave. God doesn't take them to point B, or even point C, but all the way to point Z! It is completely outside of the box. The women and disciples had thought Jesus would either continue to teach and hopefully lead an uprising or, at worst, be killed. But now an option appears that they had never even considered. Jesus is alive! Resurrection was the unimagined third option.

In the medieval world Easter Sunday was celebrated as a day of laughter because the Resurrection was the biggest joke. Satan thought he had won, but instead God had the last laugh! Jesus was not so foolish after all.

The resurrection is not simply about going to heaven when you die, although Christ opened up the gates of eternal life. The resurrection is not only about what happened to Jesus 2,000 years ago, although it began then. The resurrection is about all of us in this life today. Through it the powers of evil and corruption and suffering don't get the final say. Jesus came to share the message of the community of God, inviting us to join. A community that embraces love, justice, and peace between people, and love of God. A community that through the power of the resurrection assures us that there is always a third way. Not the easy way, but a way of God that takes us in directions we would never have planned for ourselves. Not a straight line, but a meaningful one. After the resurrection, the disciples themselves did not have an easy time of it, but with Christ they also found true life.

In between the joys of life, we all stumble over challenges and tragedies. Life is messy and hard and wonderful and scary and glorious. And we are to use it, warts and all, as the gift that it is, in service to and love for others. The poet Mary Oliver, in the closing lines of her poem "The Summer Day" asks the questions:

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

with your one wild and precious life?

And when those warts become too much for us, and we cannot see the road ahead for the tears, God leads us to resurrection. In God there is always a third way. It may take its time in

coming, but even the most tragic of situations can be redeemed in ways we could never have imagined.

I am reminded of the story of Candy Lightner whose daughter, Cari, was killed by a repeat drunk driving offender. She used her anger and grief to found the organization MADD, saving the lives of tens of thousands of people.

Or the story of Max Cleland, a Captain in the army who lost an arm and both legs in Vietnam. His book Strong in the Broken Places, outlines how he overcame despair and went on to become a Senator from Georgia, among other achievements.

Or Bill Wilson, whose alcoholism nearly killed him, but who through God found sobriety and founded Alcoholics Anonymous.

There is an Episcopal Bishop who when once asked if he believed in resurrection, responded, “Yes. I believe in resurrection. I’ve seen it too many times not to.”

God does not cause suffering, but when it happens, She stands with us. And when the only options we can see are despair and death, God opens up for us a third way. Not an easy way, but a meaningful way. A resurrection way. And new life is born.

Amen.