

April 4, 2021

Easter

It's Only Just Beginning

Matthew 28:1-10

Jeff Marian

I watched a lot of movies during the pandemic, and I'll bet many of you did as well. And I noticed a pattern in almost every movie I watched. At some point the main character in the story comes to some kind of crisis, a hopeless and insurmountable dead end, and it seems as if the story is over.

You know how this goes. The hero is captured by the villain, handcuffed, hung upside down, waiting for the proverbial axe to fall. And it seems as if the story is over. Or two lonely people who seemed destined to be together are hopelessly separated by circumstances beyond their control. And it seems as if their story is over.

And then, something unexpected happens. Something you didn't see coming happens and you realize that the story isn't over at all. The hero miraculously escapes and defeats the villain. The couple is reunited in the most amazing of ways so that they might live happily ever after.

Do you recognize that pattern in the movies you've seen and the books you've read? It's hard to think of a movie or book that doesn't follow that pattern. Over and over again we see that just when you think the story is over, something unexpected, something you couldn't see coming, happens and you realize that the story isn't over at all. It's as if this thread is woven into all the great stories. And that includes Mary's story.

Mary had lost everything at Jesus' crucifixion. She lost her dearest friend, her purpose, her hope. You can feel the weight of it as she walks to the tomb in the dim light of dawn. In Matthew's Gospel, Mary isn't going to the tomb with spices to prepare Jesus' body. She knows that the tomb has been sealed and that it's being guarded. In Matthew's Gospel, Mary is simply going to grieve all that she has lost. Jesus is dead. His story is over, and so is Mary's. It just doesn't get more final than death. Or so it seems.

But then the unexpected happens. The earth quakes. An angel appears. The guards faint with fear. The stone

is rolled away. And there's Jesus. Alive. And I can't help but imagine God seeing Mary's face, and with a voice that fills the heavens shouting, "I'll bet you didn't see that coming, did you?" Mary's story isn't over. It's only just beginning.

And then, there's us on this Easter 2021. So many of us are living stories that seem to be over. Perhaps you've lost a loved one to Covid and can't even grieve with family and friends. Or maybe you lost a job or financial security and you don't know how you're ever going to recover. Maybe it was a trip you planned, or an anniversary or wedding, and the pandemic pulled the rug out from under you. Maybe you're wondering what a "new normal" will look like, or if things will ever feel normal again. Sound familiar?

Easter proclaims that just when it seems as if our stories are over, they aren't. Easter didn't just happen; it happens. It isn't just the story of Jesus and Mary; it's our story. This thread that runs through all great stories also runs through the story of our lives. Faith is daring to believe that something good is on the way, even if we can't yet see it. Even when you feel that you've wound up in a hopeless dead end. Easter promises hope that our stories aren't yet over.

Chelsea Timmons was delivering groceries in Austin, Texas on Valentine's Day, as that massive storm that swept through Texas was raging. When she arrived at her last delivery her car slid on the ice. She wound up hopelessly stuck in the customer's flower bed. Not knowing what else to do, Chelsea carried the groceries to the front door of the house to deliver them, and that's when she met Nina and Doug. They welcomed Chelsea into their home as she called Triple A and every towing company in town, but no one was available for at least 24 hours. She imagined herself sleeping in her car until someone could pull her out. To Chelsea, it seemed as if her story was over.

But that's when the unexpected happened. Nina and Doug welcomed Chelsea into their home. Not for one night, but for nearly a week. Not just until someone could tow her car, but until her apartment had electricity and running water. They fed her, clothed her, entertained her. Now Chelsea isn't just the grocery delivery person. She's a member of Nina and Doug's family. Just when Chelsea thought her story was over, it had only just begun.

On that first Easter morning, it seemed as if Mary's story had come to an end. But it wasn't. She couldn't

have seen it coming, but Jesus' resurrection changed everything.

And that's what Easter means for you and me. Our stories are never over. No matter where you are or what you're going through, no matter how much it seems as if your story has come to an end... Jesus is with you and Jesus goes before you, already writing the next chapter.

St. Paul said it so well,

"I want you to know about the great and mighty power that God has for us followers. It is the same wonderful power he used when he raised Christ from death."

That's the power of Easter.

So here's something to think about as you live into these new days of the Easter season. God is going to roll away some stone in your life. The stone that prevents you from seeing what you still can't see. The stone that prevents you from knowing how your particular story is going to open up in new ways just when you thought it was over. The Good News of Easter is that THAT'S exactly where God is at work! In what you can't see, in what you don't yet fully know or understand. God is at work rolling those stones away. We can trust that!