

## “Jesus Is Alive!!”

Dr. D. Jay Losher

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Mark 16:1-8 = Easter

**M**any years ago at the congregation I served in Dallas, Celia Caldwell was leading Children’s Church. It was Easter and there was an overflow crowd in the children’s chapel. Celia was hard pressed to keep the lesson going.



She finally tried a different track: “What is Easter?” Hands went up ~ lots of answers involving rabbits, decorating eggs, candy, new clothes and pretty hats. Christopher Reed, age four was beside himself, jumping up and down, stretching his hand as high as he could. Finally he just couldn’t hold it any longer. He blurted out: “Mrs. Caldwell!! Jesus is alive!”

**T**he one thing you can say with certainty about the God of Abraham and Sarah is our God is a God of surprises. Just when you think you have completely figured Yahweh out, that is precisely the point of astonishment. Expect the unexpected with our God!



**SURPRISE!**

Nowhere is this demonstrated more amazingly, more definitively than when the women around Jesus came to the tomb and found the stone rolled away, the crypt empty. Only the women among Jesus’ followers were brave enough. When they found the tomb empty and met the risen LORD, Mary of Magdala and Mary, mother of Jesus, and Salome were all utterly astonished. “Unbelievable! Can it be true?” Then these blessed women ran and found the male disciples in hiding so that they could share in the shock and awe.

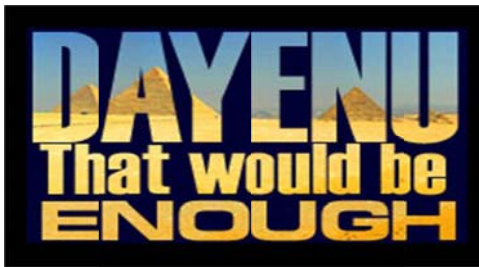


Indeed, God, our God is a God of surprises. None more surprising than “Jesus is alive!”

**T**hat Last Supper, that first communion was a Passover meal. In the Passover Seder a litany is recounted of the surprises God blessed us

with in bringing us out from Egypt and liberating us from slavery. At a critical point in the Passover liturgy, a song is sung praising God for action after action to our benefit.

The response to each in this long list of God's actions on our behalf is to sing "da-da-yeinu" which means "it would have been enough." Any one of these interventions would have been more than enough all by itself ~ yet God our God choses to repeat the actions, the interventions on our behalf over and over and over again *ad infinitum*. Praise to God and thanksgiving for goodness after



goodness.

**T**he Bible is resplendent with such actions ~ they don't begin or end just with the Exodus. The following are but a few from a long list:<sup>1</sup>

- **Creation** ~ raising life out of nothing. "da-da-yeinu" "It would have been enough."
- **Calling** ~ the choosing of Abram and Sarai, an elderly childless couple, to become mother and father of a vast nation. "It would have been enough."
- **Liberation** from slavery in Egypt. "That would have been enough."
- **Incarnation** ~ God taking on humanity in Jesus. By itself alone "That would have been enough."

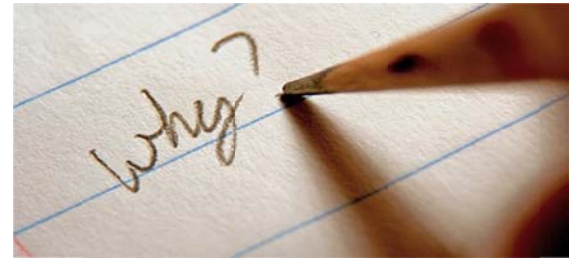


The list goes on and on ~ a powerful litany. God our God is in the business of making good stuff, wonderful surprises happen. Good stuff for us, on our behalf, for our benefit.

**B**ut then again bad stuff happens too. The good in our lives would not be meaningful if it were not in contrast with the bad. Bad things still happen and will continue to happen: hurt, pain, exploitation, oppression ~ AIDS, strokes, heart attacks, loss ~ disasters, war, racism, political deadlock, injustice, pandemics, genocide. We could add innumerably to this list as well.

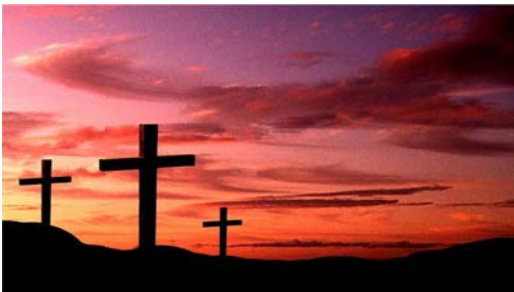


Bad stuff does happen; evil happens. Our lives are spent trying to avoid the evil and to hold onto, as much as we can, the good. The great religious thinkers spend a lot of their time trying to explain this ~ struggling mightily to explain the problem of evil.



**R**eally bad stuff does happen. Even if in our own small world life may be good, but worldwide more bad than good seems to happen. Witness the evening news every day.

But let's be clear: the worst of the worst stuff, the worst evil is death itself. We all die ~ the final destination of every living thing ~ the ultimate and inevitable and incurable curse ~ the last enemy.



So what about that litany from the Passover of the great goods God has done, is doing, will be doing? God's will is for good to overwhelm the bad. It turns out the greatest victory over the greatest enemy isn't even on the Passover list. To add to

that already long list:

- The greatest good of all of God's incomparable actions is the **Resurrection** of Jesus from the dead ~ vanquishing death itself ~ the greatest, most glorious act of God in all of history.

"It would have been enough!" It is enough!! God our God is God of goodness and grace and mercy and compassion ~ glory to God in the highest! God our God is in the change business. Passover celebrates that in spades. Easter celebrates that beyond words.<sup>2</sup>

**T**ony Campolo, a writer who joins inseparably evangelicalism with social justice, tells of a funeral when he was young at his home church in West Philadelphia. Clarence, a college friend had been killed in a subway accident. The church was filled with friends and family overcome with grief.



The pastor expounded on the scriptural promise of resurrection. He spoke special words of comfort directly to the family. He spoke movingly and poignantly of Clarence's life in a beautiful litany of things Clarence had done for others. How Clarence had served without thought of reward.



Then he addressed the corpse in the coffin directly:

“Well, Clarence that’s it. I’ve got nothing else to say except this: Good night, Clarence. Good Night!” And with that he slammed down the lid of the casket as stunned silence fell over the congregation.

Then a beautiful smile slowly lit up the pastor’s face and he shouted, “and I know that God is going to give Clarence a good morning!”

With that the choir rose to its feet and started singing “On that great getting’ up morning we shall rise, we shall rise!” All of us in the congregation rose to our feet and started singing it with them. There was clapping and crying. But they were tears of laughter.

Everywhere I looked, there were smiles amidst the tears. Celebration had broken out in the face of death. Something of the party that is to come had broken into that church. A foretaste of the joy that will one day be shared by us all was temporarily ours, a glimpse of the party prepared for all of those who die in Christ was had, and death had been swallowed up in victory.<sup>3</sup>

Now that is a witness to the resurrection! That is what a funeral should be.

**R**esurrection happens! “Jesus is alive!!” Proof positive that God, our God is in the change business, God of surprises, God of transformation. Yet more than anything else, Yahweh, God of Abraham and Sarah, God of Jesus is God of victory over death. Death the greatest enemy has been vanquished. We have been liberated to new life, changed life, transformed life.



**R**esurrection happens!! Resurrection did happen, does happen, will happen. As seen throughout Scripture, God’s original, present and ultimate will is for good stuff to happen to us. As Frederick Buechner has said of the crucifixion:



“The worst isn’t the last thing about the world. It’s the next to last.”

God always has the last word. And God had the first word as well. The first word was “**Let there be light.**” And the last word is “**The tomb is empty ~ Jesus is alive.**”



And the last word and the first word and the middle word is and always has been and always will be ~ Good News ~ God’s great Good News of new life, renewed lives, transformed worlds! All under the power of Jesus alive.

“Mrs. Caldwell. Everyone. Jesus Is Alive!”

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Gomes, professor at Harvard Divinity, at a luncheon during the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1999

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Tony Campolo, *The Kingdom of God Is A Party*