

Easter 2011 A

Texts: Acts 10: 34-43

Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24

Colossians 3: 1-4

Matthew 28: 1-10

“And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it...”Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised.”

Matt. 28: 2, 5

They were just going about their day. They didn't expect that day to turn their lives upside down. They didn't expect their hearts to be broken, their lives to be completely torn up. They didn't expect the rumbling and the shaking. It went on and on and on. One minute, two minutes, three minutes, four minutes.

Walls fell, rocks were split open; great chasms tore apart roads. The landscape looked nothing like it did minutes before. The life and landscape they knew so well had completely changed.

And the people, the people were paralyzed by fear. Should they run? Should they get out of there as quickly as they could? They had no idea that what was to come next was even more devastating, more unbelievable, more life-changing than anything that had ever happened to them.

They were just going about their day. They didn't expect that day to turn their lives upside down. They didn't expect the storm clouds to gather right on top of them. They didn't expect the moaning and roaring of the wind.

Walls fell, homes were split open, communities were torn apart. It seemed to go on and on and on. It seemed like forever, but in reality it was only a few seconds.

And the people, the people were paralyzed by fear. Should they run? Should they get out of there as quickly as they could? They didn't know what to do. The life and landscape they knew so well had completely changed in an instant.

Some things in life do not change, even after thousands of years; and yet everything changes. God breaking into the world whether as a baby or a resurrected Savior is life shattering.

We have a God so big and so awesome that nature cannot contain Him. We have a savior so life changing and life saving that we have to be told repeatedly, "Do not be afraid."

Some things in life do not change even after thousands of years, and yet everything changes. People get sick and die, tragedies unfold the world over, the innocent are condemned and the guilty are set free.

Whether we are talking about the earthquake that first Easter morning or the earthquake in Japan, whether we are talking about the storm clouds that gathered over Calvary or the storm clouds that have gathered over St. Louis, what is experienced is truly a life-quake. Life as we have known it has completely changed.

I have two friends who have experienced a life-quake. I have two friends whose experience of death and life has completely changed them. Their names are Rick and Maria.

Rick and Maria were classmates of mine in seminary. They were married and had two small children, Chloe and Max. Both Rick and Maria were seminarians. It didn't start out that way. Rick was the seminarian and Maria was just accompanying Rick to school.

Sometime during the first year, Maria entered seminary too, after many people told her that they discerned in her a call to the priesthood.

Fast-forward three years. Right before graduation Rick was not feeling well. The doctors diagnosed diverticulitis. The change in diet helped a little, but when the pain didn't go away Rick was referred to Vanderbilt University Hospital where he was diagnosed with Stage Four metastatic colon cancer.

Chemotherapy was given, clinical trials entered, but Rick and Maria very thoughtfully and painfully decided to end treatment.

When they told their doctor who was not a Christian that they were foregoing further treatment he became very angry.

“You Christians!” he said, “You always give up! You never fight to the bitter end! Why?”

Maria told me that Rick thought for a minute and said, “Because we know that death is not the worst thing that can happen to us. Your bitter end is our glorious beginning.”

Maria said the doctor looked surprised and then he left the room. Within weeks Rick was dead.

I don't know if Rick's answer was a life-quake for the doctor, but I do know that knowing and serving Christ was a life-quake for Rick and Maria. I do know that Rick's answer was God breaking into the world yet again.

I know that in following the Resurrected One their lives were never the same again.

Death is sure and certain. But what Christians know deep to their core and believe with all their hearts is that resurrection is even more sure and more certain.

Good Friday represents humanity's primal "NO!" to God.¹ God's answer to that "No!" is Easter. God's answer to that "NO!" is an eternal "Yes."

To experience Christ is to be shaken to our very core. To experience Christ is to have our lives torn open to love and compassion and service.

To experience Christ is to have our lives torn open so that we may see the pain, suffering, and despair in this world and then, as Resurrection people, carry the Resurrection message and the Resurrection love out into the world.

My Easter prayer for all of us is that Christ will shake us to our very core.

My Easter hope is that Christ will be so present in our lives that nothing less than a life-quake can describe the experience and its effects on us.

My Easter longing is that all the world will know the Resurrection whose aftershocks continue even today.

Alleluia! Alleluia! The Lord is Risen!

Amen.

¹ Rt. Rev. Nathan Baxter Day1.org/905-easter_the_manifestation_of_undefeated_love

