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Easter 1C
Peace, Seattle
March 31, 2013
1 Cor 15:19-26, Luke 24:1-12

RIPPLES OF RESURRECTION

They came to give his body a proper burial, but nothing could prepare them for what they found when they arrived—an empty tomb, and the messengers' question:
WHY DO YOU SEEK THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD?

WHY ARE WE HERE, AMONG THE DEAD?
Because tending the bodies of those we love is what know.

WHY ARE WE HERE?
Because every life, no matter how beautiful or meaningful, has its limits.

WHY SEEK HIM HERE, AMONG THE DEAD?
Because we watched him die, we saw him buried, and though we'd hoped—we'd *longed* for it to be different for him, death has still not relinquished its grip on life.

In North Seattle a drunk driver claimed the life of two proud grandparents last week as they went for a walk with their 10-day-old grandson and his mother.[1]

The details emerging from this story, and the ripples of grief fanning out it, are so poignant and painful we can hardly read them without weeping. Well-known and well-loved in their Indiana hometown, Judy and Dennis Schulte were active servants in church and community; the kind of people who knew what was worth building their lives around.

They'd purchased a home here only one month ago to be near their son Dennis, his wife Karina and their long awaited child Elias.

Karina was as a pediatric nurse at Children's Hospital, supremely skilled in caring for children and their parents at the worst moments of their lives. And little Elias, freshly in the world, had his whole life ahead of him. Now they're both at Harborview on life support.

When Mark Mullan got behind the wheel of his pickup Monday morning, he didn't PLAN to do harm, but his unrelenting addiction to alcohol assured that sooner rather than later, catastrophe would strike.

This tragedy has touched the deepest part of us because it lays bare the hidden vulnerability that attends all our lives, and raises questions for which there are no ready answers.

Though it is the most recent tragedy to capture our minds and our hearts, it is by no means the only one. Sandy Hook Elementary still claws at our consciousness, as do the spate of other shootings in the news, and the daily victim tolls from Syria, Afghanistan, and other places far and near.

As Easter morning dawns, we find ourselves with those women looking for Jesus in the graveyard because death still stalks our world, and shows no intention of relinquishing its grasp.

[1] Details of this story taken from articles in the *Seattle Times*: http://seattletimes.com/html/localnews/2020646012_accidentvictimsxml.html and http://seattletimes.com/html/localnews/2020664266_vehicularhomicidexml.html

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WHY SEEK THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD?
Because it is all we have known and all we could count on… UNTIL NOW.

This morning, though grief lies heavy in the air, something completely and utterly transforming has happened—his tomb is empty, his body is gone.

There's nothing within human experience to account for this turn of events.
Nothing that could have prepared the women for the messengers' words:
HE IS NOT HERE, BUT HAS RISEN!

And so we can understand how utterly shocked and paralyzed they must have felt as the work they had come to perform, the duty they were prepared to fulfill, is turned on its head, and they're given a new task to perform, a new job description.

No longer grave tenders, no longer embalmers, they have become witnesses and proclaimers.
FOR THE RIPPLES OF TRAGEDY AND GRIEF HAVE BECOME RIPPLES OF RESURRECTION.

My Aunt Andi died on Wednesday, at age 90, in Tacoma. In 1923, when she was six months old, she was carried onto the boat by her parents Anna & Ingvald, with two older brothers, to make the voyage from Norway to America. Her life journey took her from Norway to Northfield, Minnesota, where, during the War years she met and later married OSS ski trooper Arne Herstad, who took her out to the Pacific Northwest to start a family.

Andi was a woman who took pride in her appearance and was always "well put together." During many of her nine decades, she cared for people, and she was a deeply committed Christian.

Along the way she survived three husbands and the drowning death of her son, Raymond; and she cared for many as they approached and finally crossed the boundary from life to death.

After learning she'd been diagnosed with a rare form of cancer, I went to see her at the hospice center where she'd been placed.

I wasn't sure what shape I'd find her in when I arrived, but there she was, sitting up straight in her chair, her hair just so, her nails perfect. Her daughter Hildi had been by that morning to help her dress for the day and she looked as I'd always remembered her—she looked great.

Andi had been receiving guests in a steady stream the past few days, coming to say goodbye.
One of those guests was particularly precious—her newborn great-grandson, Raymond, named after the son she'd lost so suddenly some 50+ years before.

After some catching up, we began to talk about her diagnosis and what it meant.
Andi knew how her scenario would end. She knew that death was waiting around the corner.
But she also knew that death was not the end.

In all her years of walking with others, including many people of faith, Andi had seen the face of death many times, and she was not afraid—she knew who was waiting for her on the other side.

Having watched so many in her charge fight death's approach—resisting it tooth and nail—she wondered aloud to me, WHY… WHY DON'T THEY WANT TO RUN TO JESUS?!

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In what turned out to be our last visit, Andi was sharing her testimony of faith.
When her time came—she would not linger or hesitate—*she would be running to Jesus*.

IF FOR THIS LIFE ONLY WE HAVE HOPED IN CHRIST, writes St. Paul, WE ARE OF ALL PEOPLE MOST TO BE PITIED. BUT IN FACT CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD, THE FIRST FRUITS OF THOSE WHO HAVE DIED.

When we commend Andi into the arms of the Lord next Saturday, we will celebrate the resurrection. And when Judy and Dennis Schulte are commended into the arms of the Lord at Russiaville United Methodist Church in Indiana, their family, friends and congregation will celebrate the resurrection.

Whatever deaths attend our minds this morning—be they the little, daily deaths that mark our failure to live this precious life to its fullest; or the death of relationships and hoped-for futures; or the kind of tragic deaths that knock the wind out of us and leave us gasping for air—**whatever deaths crowd our thoughts, God looks into our eyes this Easter morning and declares:**
RISE UP! YOU ARE DEAD—JUST AS HE WAS DEAD—BUT I WILL GIVE YOU LIFE![2]

This word, and the new reality it conveys, is not something we can grasp through our intellect or our senses. Resurrection is not something we can fit our minds around.
The Risen Lord himself must teach us to believe and to live into this belief…
And that is what he does through the rest of Luke's gospel as he meets his disciples on the road to Emmaus, and back in Jerusalem once again…

AND THAT IS WHAT HE IS LONGING TO DO WITH YOU AND WITH ME.

This transformative journey from death to life isn't something we can engineer on our own, any more than we can will ourselves to rise from the grave. It is something that comes to us from outside of ourselves—yet something that promises to reshape the very core of our being when we allow ourselves to be seized by it.

The world is skeptical of such a claim—and always will be. His own disciples dismissed the women's testimony, at first, as an "idle tale."
But skepticism didn't stop the risen Christ from appearing to them that first Easter evening, and it doesn't stop him from showing up here and now—in the bread and wine of this Holy Meal, and in this community as, fed at this Table, we bear his risen life to family and neighbor, school and work place; accident zone and war zone, and to any place where death exerts its grip.

Today, actions designed to put a foreclosure on Jesus' life and mission, actions that sent ripples of grief out from the cross, have been transformed into ripples of resurrection.

For Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

[2] Karl Barth, *Threatened by Resurrection.*