

Easter – 2010  
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I was like a child who had just lost all of his Easter candy. I was a screaming, crying, fool.

I was four years old, and my parents were going out to dinner that night. Which meant that they were leaving me at home...with a baby sitter...for the first time. When this stranger showed up at the house – I pleaded with my parents – ‘don’t leave me.’ They explained that they would be back later. But all I knew was that they were leaving me behind.

I don’t even know the baby sitter’s name. I do know that I made her life a living hell for several hours. At one point, she fed me a snack – food always calms me down! – I gulped down the Oreo cookies and milk...which I promptly threw up all over her shoes. I cried until I fell asleep. But no one needed to wake me up when my parents’ car came up the lane. And, as I stood at the screen door, peering out into the night, I kept saying softly, “you came back! You came back!”

I thought I had been left behind. But that night, the best words in the English language were: “You came back.”

I wonder if, on that first Easter morning, Jesus’ disciples felt the same way?

Let’s remember – nobody expected the resurrection. Nothing in this life could have prepared those disciples for what they encountered in the cemetery that morning. They were unprepared for an empty tomb. The Gospel tells us that they simply did not understand what ‘rising from the dead’ might mean.

But, on the other hand, from the beginning of the beginning, God has made it clear that He is in the business of life, not death. If you read the Old Testament and the New Testament with even a passing interest, you will see that God is constantly working to loosen death’s grip on the human family.

From the beginning, God acts to break the power of death. And, just when human beings are convinced that God has abandoned them to the power of death and suffering – *God comes back*. And God comes back, to give us life.

When humanity's evil brought about the great flood, and Noah and his family began to lose all hope for a future....

*God came back.* And life began again.

The people of Israel were trapped in the slavery of Egypt, calling out to a silent heaven for help. Just when they thought that God was dead and all was lost, a man named Moses had his afternoon interrupted by a burning bush....

And *God came back.* And Pharaoh let the people go to freedom.

In a little corner of the Roman empire, God's people wondered if God had completely abandoned them, giving them up to the rule of the Romans.....

But *God came back.* A virgin heard an angel's message. In an insignificant stable she gave birth to a son.

Throughout the life and ministry of Jesus, our Savior was trying to show us that God comes back to give us life. Every action of Jesus should prepare us for the empty tomb. Jesus starts to unravel death from the moment he begins his preaching.

In the person of Jesus, God came back, to unravel death, and restore life. To the poor, the powerless, the sick, the sinner, the hungry, the oppressed – to the blind, the lame, the lepers, the lonely - he came back.

When will we get it in our brains? God is in the resurrection business. Has been from the beginning! Once you see that, you have to ask yourself – how could the tomb be anything OTHER than empty?

God did with dead Jesus what God wants to do with us, each day.

Easter is not just history – it is the mystery you and I are called to share. Like a panicked four year old child, there are days when I still tremble in the face of what looks like death's victory. There are days and seasons when I feel as though God has left, for good, and I am left with no one but my grief to serve as a baby sitter. The point is, whenever you and I stand weeping at the empty tombs of our lives, whenever you and I feel beaten down by

death, or sickness, or depression, or loss, or fear, or pain – whenever we feel powerless and abandoned...

*God comes back.*

An acquaintance was told: “Once a drunk, always a drunk.” And she felt like God had abandoned her to her addiction. But a co-worker handed her a note one day. A note saying, “I was a drunk too, and found a way to be sober, with God’s help. Let me know when you’re ready.”

*God came back.* And she is recovering.

A friend’s wife left him after 13 years of marriage. Her departure ripped apart his heart. He went to his church, and screamed at God. Eventually he gave up, since God appeared to be somewhere else. But now, a year later, he is beginning to find healing along the cracked edges of his heart....

*God came back.*

My uncle was told that his Multiple Sclerosis would kill him. He felt betrayed by God, and life. Then he said, “I will LIVE with it, but I’ll be damned if I’ll DIE from it.

*God came back.*

We stand at the graves of our loved ones, not sure how life will go on. But God comes back, and life DOES go on. We fall into the depths of depression or sadness, and we wonder if there will ever be joy again. And God comes back...and our hearts begin to heal. We watch our daily dose of tragedy on the evening news: war in one place, injustice in another, poverty somewhere else, oppression almost everywhere. So many places where it seems like nothing good can happen. Then God comes back, and the human family finds a way forward.

Who you gonna believe? The world tells you that death gets the last word, that life is full of meaningless suffering, that there isn’t much left for us in the end. But, for those who pay attention, there is a different message. It is shouting to us from an empty tomb this morning. Jesus died. But he came back. *He came back, to give us life.*