

Easter Sunday  
Colossians 3:1-4, Psalm 118, Matthew 28:1-10  
David H. Teschner  
April 20, 2014

I pulled a little book off the shelf recently that I hadn't looked at for quite a while. The unusual title is Expect the Worst (You won't be disappointed). It is a collection of pessimistic thoughts on family, money, work, relationships and the state of the world. The sayings are collected by Eric Marcus. He dedicated the book to his Grandma Ethel, a world class pessimist, who always told him, "I'll never live to see you married." She was right.

On Life: What can you expect from a day which begins with getting up?

On Relationships: No issue is so small that it can't be blown out of proportion.

On People: The only normal people are the ones you don't know very well.

On Family: There's nothing wrong with teenagers that reasoning with them won't aggravate.

On Love and Marriage: The trouble with loving is that pets don't last long enough and people last too long.

On God: The more you complain, the longer God lets you live.

On Health: It's no longer a question of staying healthy. It's a question of finding a sickness you like.

On Politics: It doesn't matter who you vote for, the government always gets in.

On the State of the World: More than any other time in history, humankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness; the other leads to total destruction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly.

These sayings make us laugh because we recognize a measure of truth in them. Sometimes it seems easier for us to be pessimistic than optimistic, given the abundance of bad news that floods the airways – mass stabbings and shootings, missing planes, mudslides and avalanches and capsized ferries.

When you stop and think about it, Jesus had every right to be pessimistic. He sacrificed everything to bring the message of God's kingdom to the people, and they showed their appreciation by betraying him, deserting him, denying him and, finally, crucifying him.

The disciples had every right to be pessimistic when the man they pinned their hopes and futures on allowed himself to be arrested without a fight and ended up nailed to a cross.

The faithful women had every reason to be pessimistic. They watched Jesus die and saw where his body had been buried. Early in the morning, two days later, when they come to grieve their overwhelming loss, they encounter an earthquake, an eye-blinding angel and an empty tomb.

Nothing has gone according to plans for days for these women and now this. Maybe their thoughts ran like Grandma Ethel's: "Things are going to get a lot worse before they get worse." Fortunately, that's not the case this time.

The angel has incredible, hard-to-believe news, but it's good news. Jesus is not dead in the tomb. He is alive again.

We hear a little Matthew humor and irony: The very much alive soldiers posted to guard the dead Jesus become like dead men and Jesus is alive.

Much to the women's credit, even though they are dazed and afraid, they recover quickly and believe what the angel tells them. We're told they run with fear and joy to tell the disciples. When was the last time you ran to tell someone something marvelous?

Is it possible the women ran so fast they caught up to Jesus on his way to Galilee? Unlikely, but they are rewarded either way for their persistent faithfulness to their now risen Lord. They have a direct encounter well before the disciples do.

The story of the empty tomb is an old story now. The four gospel writers each tell it a little differently, and no two resurrection appearances are alike. This may make us suspicious, even a little pessimistic that it happened at all. Based on declining church attendance, belief in the resurrection may very well be slipping, too.

But you are here today. I think that while the story is a bit fantastic, we desperately want to believe that there is more to life than just what we see and hear on TV or the internet. And there is someone greater and wiser than we human beings that we can believe in; someone who is tirelessly seeking the best for us.

Those of us who attend this church faithfully and work and give for the mission of spreading God's love as far and wide as possible would say we know Jesus was raised from the dead because we experience new life personally and corporately. We don't need the story to prove to us that Jesus lives because we see him and know him in each other and in strangers as well.

The angel first and then the risen Jesus told the women to tell the disciples that Jesus would meet them in Galilee. Galilee is beyond Jerusalem to the north. This is Matthew's way of telling future generations that Jesus is always out there ahead of us. He will meet us in the next place we are going, the next person we meet, the next situation we find ourselves in, good or ill. We are not on our own to fend for ourselves by our own wits. Sometimes we need to ask for his help, however.

Easter is the joyful proclamation that death is not the final word. God can bring something truly wonderful from what appears to be disastrous.

The pessimist would say, "I always read the last page of the book first, so if I die, I'll know how it turned out." The person with Easter faith would say, "It's okay if I die before I finish reading the book, because the very best chapter begins then anyway."  
AMEN.