

Easter Sunday C 2019  
April 21, 2019 :: Luke 24:1-12  
Fr. Jim Cook

*“Resurrection Faith & Resurrection Hope.”*

One night, about ten years ago, I was watching TV when my cable provider scrolled a message across the bottom of the screen. It informed me that I had free access to several premium channels for the next few days. So I pulled up the channel guide to see what I could see. And after scrolling around a bit, I came across a show whose title caught my eye: it was “Letting Go of God.” And the information about it told me that it was a one-woman comedy show, in which Julia Sweeney (of *Saturday Night Live* fame) talks about her own spiritual journey. Naturally, I thought it sounded interesting, and so I set up the DVR to record it.

A few evenings later, Peggy and I watched the first half, in which Julia took us from her childhood as an Irish Catholic, to her as an adult searching for a meaningful relationship with God. We both enjoyed it very much. And I thought: “This is really great! This is *exactly* what the church needs: an attractive, intelligent, and articulate *advocate*! Good for you, Julia! And good for the church!

But a couple of evenings later, we watched the second half. We couldn't have been more disappointed. In hindsight, I guess I should have anticipated that the title of the show — “Letting Go of God” — was meant to be taken literally. Because by the end of the second half of the show, Julia was an avowed atheist. And I thought: “Great! That's just what the Church needs: an attractive, intelligent and articulate *detractor*. Not!”

But a few days after that, I was still thinking about that show, when it suddenly occurred to me: “Oh, my God! Here is a woman who has no hope. She has no hope that she'll ever again see any of her loved-ones who have died. She has no hope that there is anything more to this world than ... well, this world. And I thought that was just the saddest thing. I mean, is that any sort of way to live a life?”

Even St. Paul, in that part of his letter to the Corinthians that we heard this morning, said something to this effect, that

“If the resurrection is a lie, if the only thing we have to hope for is in *this* life, then we are ... of *all* people ... most to be pitied.”

Honestly, I don't think I could stand it, if I didn't believe what the Bible tells us about a life after death. Because there are people whom I'd like to see again "on the other side." Three people especially come to mind, whose names I always try to mention aloud in our Sunday prayer lists: Becky, Gene, and Kay. They were my friends, and each died a horribly tragic death while still very young. I think about them often. And really the only consolation for me now, is the *hope* that I will be able to see them again, and that they'll no longer be victims of the circumstances that ultimately took their lives. That's my hope.

Well, today is Easter Sunday, and today is all about hope. And our gospel reading announces the reason for that hope: the resurrection of Jesus.

But, you know, it's a story that didn't start out very hopeful at all. On Friday afternoon, the followers of Jesus had watched as he died on the Cross. They watched as his body was stabbed with a spear, to confirm the fact of his death. They watched as his body was taken down from the Cross, and placed into a tomb. And they watched as the tomb was sealed. And with the death of Jesus, all of their hope had vanished.

I can only imagine what they must have been feeling, having lost a close friend, a teacher, and a beloved companion. But what made things worse, was the fact that all of their hopes had been pinned on Jesus; on his *successful* mission, on his *long* life, on his *productive* ministry. But those hopes died when Jesus died.

But early on Sunday morning, some women go to the tomb of Jesus, and find that the tomb had been opened, and now stands empty. Suddenly, those women encounter “two men in dazzling clothes,” who, remind them that Jesus had *repeatedly predicted* not only his betrayal and death, but *also* his resurrection. “He is not here, but has risen!” they assured the women. And so those women rush off to tell the others, their hopes now renewed.

Ever since that moment, belief in the resurrection of Jesus, has been the epicenter of our faith. In fact, C. H. Dodd, a noted New Testament scholar and theologian, put it like this: belief in the resurrection is

“not a belief that grew up *within* the church; it is the belief *around which* the church itself grew up, and [was] the ‘given’ upon which its faith was based.”

Now, I will freely admit to you all, that one reason I believe in the resurrection of Jesus, is because, at a very deep level, I *want* the Easter story to be true. I believe that faith grows out of the soil of our yearning, and something primal in each of us cries out against the finality of death.

But that's not the only reason. I also believe because I have gotten to know God. And I know that God is love. And we humans, who are made in the image and likeness of God, want to keep alive those whom we love. And we do *not* let them die; they live on in our memories, and in our hearts, long after we have stopped seeing them.

But for whatever reason — and our free will probably has something to do with it — but for some reason, God allows a world in which a lovely young woman named Becky can be murdered by her mentally unstable husband, and where teenagers, like Gene and Kay, can find their lives so unbearable that they chose to end them.

But having said that, I also believe — and if I *did not* believe this, I *could not* believe in a loving God — I also believe that *God is not satisfied* with such a blighted planet. Divine love — God’s love — will always find a way to overcome. “Death, be not proud,” wrote John Donne, because he knew that God would not let death win. Because God is not finished with us. And because God is not finished with this world.

And so, that’s why I believe in the resurrection of Jesus. And that’s why I believe in a life to come for *all* of us. And that’s why I can still hold on to the hope that, one day, Julia Sweeney (of *Saturday Night Life* fame) will produce yet another show, but this time it’ll be entitled “Finding God Again.”

Amen. Christ is risen! **The Lord is risen indeed! Amen!**