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The summer of 1979 was a time of innocence and anxiety. That fall I would enter the seventh grade at Siloam Springs Junior High. There were mythical stories of ninth graders flushing the heads of incoming students or clipping our belts to the flag pole rope and hoisting us up to flap in the wind as our peers saluted. None of these hazings materialized. But the rumors were terrifying enough to remain pretty vivid all these 44 years later.

Our family trip to St. Louis that summer may have been taken in celebration of my graduation from Northside Elementary. But it felt more like a last wish granted to a young man who's been condemned.

We took in a Cardinals game where they retired the legendary Lou Brock's number. And then we made the obligatory visit to the St. Louis Arch. I don't know how long we waited in line for the elevator. All lines feel interminable to a sixth-grade boy. But when we finally entered the tiny car and the doors began to close, my father began gasping for air and bolted back out in a wheezing fit of claustrophobia. I didn't know my dad was scared of anything until that moment. I probably still can't appreciate what it cost him to catch his breath in front of all those impatient tourists, reenter the little windowless room, and ride with us up to the top.

Maybe you can relate to Dad's fear of tight spaces. Or maybe your fears work in opposite ways, like Temple Grandin's. Do you know her? She's a brilliant writer, teacher, and animal husbandry researcher. Dr. Grandin is also on the autism spectrum. And some of the breakthroughs she made in her field arose from how she dealt with the anxiety she experienced in college. One day she witnessed how cows grow calm when their bodies are held in what's called a squeeze shoot, a kind of metal cage whose sides close in gently on the animal's ribcage until she can't move. This would have been the ultimate torture device for my father. But Temple made a hug machine out of plywood and pulleys that she kept in her dorm room. When she began to feel overwhelmed, she'd crawl in and pull the rope. Her racing heart would slow, and her breathing would calm as her invention held her body tight.

The same world can register as very different fears in the minds and bodies of different people. And those fears may require different strategies to ease them. Do your fears ignite when the world is closing in too tightly or when you're feeling unmoored, un-held, disconnected? It's helpful to know how our fears work if we're to keep them from taking over. Especially in a world with industries and institutions whose powers manifest in our fears.

Christians say that in the resurrection of Jesus, the power of sin and death in our lives was broken. I've come to think this is theological language for the deep seats and sources of our fears.

Dad's body told him there wasn't enough oxygen to live on in that elevator car. The fear of death really can come rushing into this moment in which we are very much alive and take it over. Temple Grandin feared that, given her different ways of processing the world, she would never measure up or be deemed worthy of a place among so called normal folks. Fear that our inadequacies and failures define us and make us unworthy is different from the fear of death, but it can be just as debilitating.

My spiritual director says we have to find ways to change the storyline sometimes. What I'm wondering this Easter morning is whether the resurrection still has the power to change the storylines that produce the fears we carry in our bodies and minds. Which is to say I'm wondering if the Resurrection has saving power for lives like ours as we actually live them out today.

You may know that the resurrection storylines are a little different in each of the four gospels. For example, in John, Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb alone in the dark and sees that the stone has already been rolled away. In Luke, she is accompanied by Joanna, Mary the mother of James and several other unnamed women. They go to the tomb at dawn with spices. In Mark, it's the two Marys and a woman named Salome who arrive with their spices when the sun had risen. In Matthew's account, which we read today, it's just Mary Magdalene and the other Mary and there's an earthquake no one else mentions and an angel who appears, rolls back the stone, and sits down on it, all right in front of the women and the guards who became "like dead men" they're so afraid of what they've just seen.

If you're a Sergeant Friday type and want just the facts, these differences can be unsettling. I also used to think they were flaws, but I've come to wonder whether the Church preserved these differences because it wanted the power of the resurrection to reach different people with different lives and fears. Gustav Mahler said "Tradition is tending the flame... not worshiping the ashes." The Christian scriptures themselves seem to have preserved the practice of tending the resurrection's flame by tweaking the storyline based on which community was trying to see by its light. Worshiping the ashes, I suppose, would have meant mummifying the good news of the resurrection into a single account for one kind of life.

Matthew tells us that everything the women witnessed that morning — the earthquake and the angel rolling back the stone and sitting down — all of it registered as fear and great joy. Fear we understand. And we understand some of their joy, if it's at the news that their friend is no longer dead. But something more than having a few more days with Jesus is happening. A shift in a deeper storyline seems to be taking place.

Their friend Jesus, you may remember, didn't just die at the ripe old age of 33. He was crucified. Executed publicly by the Roman Empire as an example. The gospels also preserve the hostilities within the Jewish community about this Jesus, sometimes altering the story to sound like Jesus was killed by "the Jews," when in fact he and all of his first followers were Jews. Storylines in family fights can also change in unhelpful ways.

But the empire ruled through a version of the story all empires rule by. Empires rule by the force of chariots and tanks. They rule quite literally by holding the power of death over their subjects. Empires also get to determine what counts as sin, and therefore who must be punished and how.

Roman power made sense, given its founding myth.* Romulus and Remus were twin sons of Rhea, fathered by the war God Mars. King Amulius was threatened by the birth and ordered the twins drowned in the Tiber River. Sound familiar? But the infants were saved by a she-wolf and a woodpecker, who suckled them until they were found. When the boys grew up they built a city on the site where they'd been saved. One day Romulus built a wall around it, and when Remus jumped over, he killed him. Rome was named for Romulus, the victor. Such was the Roman Empire storyline. It's the living brother who gets to rule, of course. Not the dead one.

But the Hebrew women at the tomb had a different origin story. Their scriptures told of the first two brothers, the sons of Eve and Adam. Do you remember it? Cain and Abel both brought

* For the insight about the contrasting the story of Cain and Able with Romulus and Remus, I am indebted to a book with the splendid title *Raising Abel*, by James Alison, who preached at Calvary's Lenten Preaching Series in 2020.

offerings, but God preferred the offering of Abel. Cain killed his brother in a fit of jealousy. In the founding myth of Rome, like so many others, the victorious brother gets the city. But the Hebrews' God was different from the war god Mars. God told Cain, the victor, "Your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground." And God did not give Cain a city. Rather, Cain would bear a mark so as not to be killed as he wandered the earth as a stranger to it. His curse was never to have a city to call home.

The Hebrews' story was the myth of Rome inverted. The Hebrews' God sided with the victim, not the victor, and provided mercy even to Cain.

Good Friday was just another day in the Roman Empire, as it wielded its power over sin and death on some insignificant hillside in Palestine, killing a rabbi who told stories it found dangerously different. But we heard in our Good Friday prayers that the power of sin and death in our lives was broken that day, because the storyline that still seems so pervasive and persuasive shattered when that rabbi was raised from the dead.

This past Good Friday I turned 56. And I'm just one Christian, so take this for what it's worth. But living in this beautiful, broken, soulful city that is also so plagued with violence, I'm ready to stop filling my imagination with stories about violent victors. And I mean this quite literally. I think I'm finished consuming uncomplicated myths and movies whose plots depend on the hope that the good guys are better armed and more dangerous than the bad guys. Because that old storyline still kills us. Sometimes it kills us with actual people with actual guns who actually believe killing is the way to a better world. But the violent story also shows up in our minds and our bodies in the form of fear even when we're not looking down the barrel of a gun or strapping one to our thigh to look like a storybook hero. We're all on guard. Even the violent victor only holds onto his power by looking always over his shoulder.

The fears of a sixth-grade boy, a middle-aged parent, a brilliant and autistic woman, and you are all a little different. I don't know whether a hug machine or a little fresh air will help ease the fears that gather today in your mind and body. But I no longer believe any of us are healed ultimately by the storylines of Rome.

And don't we all want some of what we saw when the fears of those women at the tomb were broken open with joy that first Easter morning? I don't want to live by the story of the violent victors for a minute of whatever time I have left in this life. I want a life that listens to and longs for deeper connection to the God of Abel, don't you? A life that is fired by the power of the resurrection of Jesus, who taught us not to return evil for evil, violence for violence, harm for harm, and then showed us what those teachings can look like even in a life an empire is trying futilely to control. The one who showed us whether we have thirty-three years on this earth or three times thirty-three years, what God desires is that the fear of sin and death be broken in your heart and in mine as a different, truer, eternal storyline takes them over, and teaches our once fearful hearts the living way of vulnerable, self-giving love.

Christ is risen, my friends! Christ is risen! The only work that's left for us to do is walk away from the stories of the empire, and commit together to being the people of Abel's God, the community of Jesus, and to giving our fears over to his resurrection to be raised as joy.