

**From Disaster to Home**  
**The Great Vigil of Easter**  
**Sunday, April 11, 2020**  
**The Rev. Paul McLain**

“At that time, I will bring you home.” In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Kathy Izard and her sisters didn't play house growing up. They played Hallmark. For every relative's birthday, anniversary, or holiday, their Mom got out the craft supplies and she and the girls created elaborate custom cards. Glitter and glue were not enough. Each card had to have a theme, an illustration, and a message.

For Kathy's six-year old birthday party, her Mom went over the top. She stenciled ten beautiful invitations for Kathy's friends. They selected a cartoon theme for the party and each friend came as their favorite character. Kathy went as Linus. Her mom painstakingly penned, painted, and baked for the big day. Everything was flawless, including making sure Kathy got the one present for which she wished – an Easy-Bake Oven.

Three months later, Kathy looked up from her Barbies and saw her mom in the backyard garden. But something was different. Her Mom held the clippers but she wasn't trimming roses. She appeared to be talking to someone, but nobody was there. She moved from bloom to bloom, talking to the roses. When the girls went out to check on her, she didn't recognize them.

For the next 16 years, Kathy's mom would be in and out of mental institutions. When her Mom was at home, she was never the same. She slept most of the time. Kathy felt like her childhood had been robbed from her. She felt like this disaster had destroyed her home.

In the scripture lesson from Zephaniah we heard earlier, the prophet speaks to a people who were going through a time of national and global devastation, and were experiencing isolation from their community. Sounds familiar. Instead of closing his last oracle of prophecy with a stern word of admonition or even a prayer, Zephaniah does something different. He closes by inviting the people to join him in a song. A song of victory. A song of joy. A song of hope. Zephaniah looks through and beyond the time of disaster to the time of restoration. And he says God will not only bring victory over the enemy, God will lead and join the people in singing this song of Alleluia. In the midst of the song are the three most comforting words in all the Bible, the three words we need **most** right now – Do not fear. Those are the words we just heard the angel say to the women at the empty tomb. “Do not fear. I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised.” Then the risen Jesus himself appears to the women. And his first three words to them are: “Do not fear. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

This Easter season I find myself most identifying with Jesus's male disciples. Their first experience of the resurrection did not happen through the magnificent appearance of an angel or by falling at the feet of the risen Jesus himself. Instead, resurrection came to them as they were

locked away in their homes, just as you are tonight. Resurrection came for them when the women knocked on their doors and shared the good news, probably with this preface, “Do not fear.” No matter where or how, the important thing is: resurrection still comes!

In the song from Zephaniah, God sings out, “I will remove disaster from you. And I will bring you home at the time I will gather you.” God also sings, “I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise.”

After hearing about Kathy IZARD’s Hallmark early childhood, you will not be surprised that she later became a graphic designer in Charlotte. She had given up on God and church until one day, one of her daughters spotted a painting of Jesus, and said “Momma, who’s that?” The next Sunday she loaded up her family in the minivan and took them to church. There, she learned of an outreach ministry much like our community breakfast that needed a family to volunteer for the fourth Sunday. So, a few Sundays later, she again loaded up the minivan and took her family to the Urban Ministry Center to make and serve soup and sandwiches for anyone who needed them.

Around that time, Kathy’s mom, whose mental illness had finally been diagnosed as bipolar and who was responding well to medication and therapy, sent Kathy a book entitled, *Same Kind of Different as Me*. It tells the story of the unusual friendship between Ron Hall and Denver Moore, a homeless man, that changed both their lives forever. Kathy’s party-planning instincts from her early childhood kicked in, and she decided to hold a fund-raising gala for the Urban Ministry Center. She invited Ron and Denver to be the guest speakers.

Before the banquet, Kathy proudly showed Denver around the center. To her dismay, he did not seem too impressed. Instead, he had one question for her, “Where are the beds?” Answering that question propelled Kathy on a five-year journey to raise ten million dollars to turn a former junkyard into a 100-unit apartment complex to give permanent housing to the chronically homeless. She named it Moore Place, both for Denver Moore who asked the question and for the first couple who donated to the project, whose last name also happened to be Moore.

Along this five-year impossible journey, unexpected persons would pop up at just the right time. Kathy, who felt God had abandoned her as a 6-year old, learned that God is not only still here, but is singing alongside her. Near the end of Kathy’s book, *The One Hundred Story Home*, Kathy shows her mom around Moore Place just before the Grand Opening. Her mom tells Kathy and her sister, “I always wanted to be there for you girls, but then *it* would happen *again*,” meaning one of her isolating episodes of mental illness.

Kathy writes, “There it was: the shame, the secret, and the thing we could never talk about. Mom’s version of ‘again’ was so different than how it all could have been. Any one of those ‘agains’ could have been the end. Each spiral into mania could have been a suicide. With each round of new medicine, she could have stopped taking them. The pain of each lost year could have been amplified if she had coped using alcohol. None of that was her story. None of that became my story. We stood together in the moment, and the past forty years, including those sixteen Lost Years, were with us. Seconds earlier, those years had been wedged between us, but it felt like they had just begun to compress in a time warp pulling us together in an accordion of forgiveness.”

As though it were foretold by Zephaniah, God still had some more singing to do with Kathy. A friend invited her to put her newfound gifts to help raise twenty-five million dollars for HopeWay, the region’s first and only nonprofit residential facility for treating mental illness.

God sang Kathy full circle from disaster to home. In this unique Easter, God is singing *us* there too. *Amen.*