

A Force to Counter Death

Resurrection of Our Lord
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Sunday, April 12, 2009
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Isaiah 25:6-9; I Cor. 15:1-11; Mark 16:1-8

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Journalist and author Chris Hedges hates war. He called war one of the most “heady and intoxicating, addictive enterprises ever created by humankind.” Now, Hedges is no pacifist, and believes sometimes a nation must wage war when there is a moral imperative. But he doesn’t tend toward a hawkish political stance, either. When you listen to Hedges’ reflections on his experience of being in Sarajevo during the Bosnian War in the early 1990’s, what you discover about Hedges is not a position based on politics, but rather, based on faith. He’s the son of a Presbyterian minister, and has a degree from Harvard Divinity School. Those give shape to his reflections about his experiences.

After his return from Sarajevo, Hedges wrote, “*Love is the only force that finally can counter the force of death...*” He described the chaos in Sarajevo, as people were literally lying in pools of their own blood, and then said this: “*Just as death seemed to radiate out from that point, at the same time love radiated out.*” As example, he told of a Bosnian (Muslim) farmer who supplied milk from his small farm for 200 plus days for the baby of his Serbian (Orthodox Christian) neighbors. The two were supposed to be enemies, but Hedges saw that small act of love as a seed of hope and reconciliation and life in the midst of death.

So take his words, and apply them to the cross and tomb this Easter Day: *Love is the only force that finally can counter the force of death...Just as death seemed to radiate out from that point, at the same time love radiated out.*

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, go to the tomb early in the morning, preparing to pour fragrant oils over death—they were going to prepare Jesus’ lifeless body for real burial, now that the Sabbath was over and work was allowed. They went to the tomb in which they had witnessed Jesus’ body being placed on Good Friday. Death had radiated out, from the Governor’s headquarters where Jesus was accused and convicted and abused, from Golgotha where he was nailed to his cross and crucified, and from the tomb hastily purchased for Jesus by the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea. Mark’s Gospel gives us these sparse but clear details in chapter 15. Death had won, and the women were left with the sad task of making Jesus’ body ready. Death had won and this time burial would be final.

And then Mark reveals to us the words of a young man at the open door of the tomb: “*You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified...*” (Here we’re reminded that death radiated out from this point. Jesus really died.) Then the young man continues: “*He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.*”

If Chris Hedges is right, we know what happened here: *Love is the only force that finally can counter the force of death.* Love more powerful than anything we have ever known raised Jesus. Love simply radiated out from that tomb, pushed back the stone, took away the stench of death, changed the name of the victor forever.

The women were totally disoriented. What should they do now? After all, their gender-based role in 1st century Palestine as anointers of dead bodies was rendered null and void by the absence of a body to anoint! In fact, their traditional role was completely countermanded by the young man's new imperative for them: "*Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee...*"

Love has gone ahead of you to Galilee. Go there and you will see it; you will see him. Love will radiate out from **that** point.

We know nothing more of the events of that day. Mark's Gospel ends there. Later manuscript writers include other verses, and our Bibles offer us some additional endings, but scholars are fairly confident that verse 8 was Mark's final word on the subject. Some ending: "*...and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*"

But they must have said something to somebody because, as St. Paul writes to the Corinthians in our 2nd lesson today, "*...So we proclaim and so you have come to believe.*" Somebody must have said something to somebody else, right on down to our generation.

Like the women who went to the tomb to pour fragrant oils over death, you and I have been given a new charge: Proclaim life! Announce the truth—that love alone can counter the force of death! That God is the One who offers such love! The Risen Lord has gone ahead of you to Galilee; go there and you will see him, just as he told you.

Hmm, now, what are we to make of that imperative "Go to Galilee"? Well, we can consider that command two ways, and both are appropriate, I think. First, Mark may be signaling us to go back to the beginning of his Gospel, which describes the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry. You see, Jesus' ministry began in Galilee. He walked from one Galilean town to another saying, "*The Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the good news.*" Perhaps Mark is saying, go back and read what I have written so far. Go back to the beginning of my stories about Jesus. Study his teachings, learn his ways, follow his path, take up his cross, place your trust in him. Most certainly listening to what scripture has to say is worth our time. So, yes, go to Galilee; you will see him there, just as he told you.

But here's a second thought: Galilee was home to most of Jesus' disciples. It was where they fished and farmed, raised families, went to the synagogue, lived in community. Maybe Mark is suggesting that the Risen Lord—love himself—has gone ahead of us to all the places you and I will go each day. When we go to those places—our offices, homes, neighborhoods, schools—he will be there. That means love doesn't just radiate out from wooden cross or empty tomb. Love radiates out from wherever a disciple of our Lord Jesus stands. We counter the force of death with every word and deed. And on this day, love radiates out from points all across our globe as Christians everywhere celebrate the triumph of resurrection!

Wherever our Galilees are, know that Our Lord goes ahead of us and meets us there, so that life may be joyfully proclaimed and love generously shared. **Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

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