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Matthew 28:1-10

Acts 10:34-43

Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24

Colossians 3:1-4

April 12, 2020
Easter Sunday

I hope all of you are having a beautiful and blessed Easter Sunday. Here in Goochland, the weather is perfect for a spring morning. The dogwoods and red buds are blooming, the grass is bright green, the sun is warm. Our windows are open at home and the breeze is such a welcome visitor during these long hours of quarantine.

In Goochland, we are blessed to have the outdoors as our constant companion and that has made this time of isolation a little more comforting.

Those of you who know me, know I have a horse named River and we spend a lot of time outdoors together. He is a big beautiful grey Belgian Thoroughbred. If you don't know what that is...no worries. Just take my word for it...he's really pretty.

River and I Foxhunt together but I am still nervous to go fast in open fields and I am in no way ready to jump those fences that other riders fly over with pure joy. And, I especially don't want to go over them as I gallop down a hillside dodging low hanging tree branches while getting mud splashed in my face, heart pounding and knees shaking.

And then came an important lesson.

It all started rather innocently. Bennett, my riding instructor, set up a small one-foot jump, that was followed by three strides and then a slightly larger jump. It wasn't so bad...at first. But then she started raising that second jump. 2 feet. 2 ¼ feet. 2 ½ feet. 2 ¾ feet. 3 feet.

I was none too happy and really wanted to call it a day. I wasn't ready. It was pushing me out of my comfort zone. I wanted to stay with the familiar and easy. But, Bennett was having none of it. She said, Emily, you have to learn this because one day you are going to be in the hunt field and are going to need the skills to get yourself out of a difficult situation.

Then, she raised the pole to 3 feet, 3 inches. (If you need a visual as to how tall that is, I suggest you get out a tape measure.)

Here is what I learned...Bennett was right. I needed to learn how to go over that jump. I needed to learn not because it was high but because it taught me that I had to grow. And to grow, I had to build this partnership with River. I couldn't do it on my own. I had to trust that big, goofy, beautiful grey horse. If I believed he was capable, if I believed he wanted us to succeed, if I believed that together we could navigate anything put in front of us, then I would be safe.

The power of partnership. The importance of trust. The commitment to practice.

Possibly, this is also the lesson of Easter. Partnership, trust, and practice.

With Easter, we are given the greatest gift imaginable. But anyone who has followed this incredible gift of Resurrection living knows one thing...it isn't a magic switch that turns on this powerful light that suddenly transforms who we are, what we feel, what we do.

Maybe that sounds a little harsh to say on Easter. But I think there is quite a bit of truth that statement. You don't suddenly become a flawless follower of Christ just because Jesus died for your sins on Good Friday. You don't instantly have a life free of difficulty just because Jesus was resurrected on Easter Sunday. You won't always have a perfect faith just because you have been redeemed through this remarkable gift of new life.

If we look at Easter as a quick fix or an easy answer, we will be disappointed. If we expect Easter to shield us from difficulty, we will be disillusioned. If we expect Easter to insure us that our faith will always be strong, we will be disheartened.

Easter alone can't do these things. We have to be willing to live into the Easter promise, to not be passive participants taking the easy path forward just because it's comfortable and familiar. Easter living (or what I often hear called Resurrection living) is about partnership, trust, and practice.

Faith is not meant to be a solitary endeavor; neither is resurrection living. You have to be willing to partner with Jesus. To put your life in God's hands. To allow yourself to be held by divine holiness even though it may be scary and vulnerable. You must be willing to say, God, I can't do this on my own.

And, then you have to be willing to trust that God is going to be there. Not some distant, judgmental, kind of God but a loving, life-giving God who is going to work in and through you for good.

Finally, you have to be willing to practice. In some ways, this may be the hardest thing to do. No matter how great Easter can be, no matter how much joy is found on this one Sunday, we are going to have moments of doubt. We may ebb and flow within our faith. Sometimes feeling strong and sometimes feeling weak. But, we have to keep practicing and coming back over and over again to the joy that we feel today.

Resurrection living requires our commitment to cultivating a deeper, more loving relationship with God. A relationship we can build our trust upon. A relationship we can count on.

Easter calls us to celebration but it also calls us to preparation. Preparation for a life defined by our partnership with the God who loved us so much that he gave his only begotten Son for our life. That is the most powerful partnership we will ever receive.

Thanks be to God. Amen.