

Easter Day C'19

21 April 2019

Rom. 6.3-11; John 20.18

St. Luke's Episcopal Church

North Little Rock, Arkansas

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"Grant us so to die daily to sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection, through Christ our Lord." Amen. -From the Collect for Easter Day

We live in a world that is tired, angry, divided, and we often find ourselves feeling that way, and yet we still arose from the bed! Easter hope, or perhaps just the hope of Easter hope, still draws us towards a life worth living. In spite of our tired, angry, and divided world many of us recently came together through two totally unrelated events. The first is the burning of the Cathedral of Notre Dame and the second is the stunning victory of Tiger Woods at the Masters Golf Championship. There are two particular images I would ask that you picture in your mind's eye for a moment. The first image is of the Cathedral of Notre Dame after the flames were put out and photographers captured a photo of the fully intact golden cross above the altar, and a sunbeam shining through the non-existent ceiling and charred walls making the cross glisten. The second image is of Tiger Woods with an ear-to-ear smile, raising his arms in triumph after winning the Masters. We didn't have to be religious or

Catholic, and we didn't even have to like golf, yet many throughout the world, including many of us, were transfixed by these two events.

What did Notre Dame and Tiger Woods have in common? They were both getting older, both were famous and had a glorious past, and both had experienced a major defeat and in Tiger's case, multiple defeats over the last decade or so. Prior to Tiger's recent victory he had been on a decade long downward spiral that began with the revelation of multiple instances of infidelity, drug use, multiple DUI's, plus a career that appeared to have died. He became the butt of jokes like this one: *"Did you hear that Tiger Woods changed his name? yeah, he sure did, he changed it to Lion-Cheetah!"* This proverbial rock bottom experience that Tiger reached was not the end of the story but was just the beginning. In his humbled condition he sought treatment for his multiple addictions, he entered a 12-step program and became clean and sober from drugs, alcohol, and illicit relationships. He took better care of his body and began to develop healthier relationships with his family and significant others. In 12-step terminology, he was restored to sanity by a Power greater than

himself – oh yeah, and by the way, he won the Masters after a 10-year dry spell! The old Tiger had to die, so that the new Tiger could live!

Much of Notre Dame has been saved and will be rebuilt with the donations that are pouring in. Their plight has encouraged Christians in Louisiana to donate \$2 million in donations to help rebuild churches there that were burned by arsonists. Not a single brick of Notre Dame has been repaired yet, but new life is already coming out of tragedy.

We ordinary people relate to defeats and tragedies like these for at one time or the other we too have suffered defeats and tragedies and we all long for the Easter hope of resurrection. We want to see something like Notre Dame, that once was beautiful but is now badly broken, restored. We want to see someone who is broken and flawed rise to victory from the ashes of defeat, and we ourselves want to experience the New Life of resurrection...And we want to experience the New Life of resurrection - not only on some distant day in the future up above, but now.

Honestly, if there hadn't continued to be resurrection in the lives of Jesus' followers

our faith would have died out centuries ago. In today's gospel one of the main heroes (besides Jesus) was of a very flawed and broken person, whose name was Mary Magdalene. Talking about a tragic past with a life of fighting demons that degraded her, and robbed her of her dignity.

But something happened to Mary, the level of pain she experienced brought her to the end of her rope and that's precisely the time she met Jesus, and saw his miracles, and her heart burned with the Spirit as she hung on his every word. She came to believe in a Power greater than herself and that Jesus could restore her to sanity. And restore her he did! But not just back to good mental and physical health but he transformed her, body, mind, and soul! Like one old preacher would say, "She did some business with God", by dying to her old life so that she could start to live a New Life, the life of her true self that God always intended for her to be. She became empowered by the Holy Spirit and developed into a powerful leader and will forever hold the distinction of being the very first witness to the resurrection!

The old Mary had to die, so that the new Mary could live!

There is an ancient monastery located on the Greek peninsula called Mt. Athos. In order to enter the monastery, you have to pass through an archway that has an inscription that reads: "If you die before you die, then when you die, you won't die."

(repeat)

This inscription, along with all of our defeats and tragedies point us to the goal of the spiritual life – which is to die (to the power of our ego-centered lives) before we die, (prior to our physical death). This is the way of the Cross – the Way of Jesus – his victory was sealed and our victories are sealed, when we can say along with

Jesus: "Not my will, but thy will be done!" 

If you die — *If your ego-centered false self dies*
Before you die — *prior to the death of your physical body,*
Then you won't die — *then your True-Self will not die*
When you die. — *when your physical body dies.*