

Life Abounds
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When I was in college, my senior year,
I very carefully arranged my schedule.
I had a Monday night seminar - 7pm to 10pm. I had a
Tuesday and Thursday class that met at 2:30 p.m.
Senior seminar met weekly on Wednesdays at 4 p.m.,
and debate, which didn't have a class time, per se,
but students would usually show in the debate room to
work around 8 p.m.

So, I never needed to be out of bed before 2 p.m.
1:30 if I wanted to be presentable.
It was awesome. For a night owl like me -
to leave the debate room at 2 a.m., walk to the all-
night diner and stay up for another few hours,
talking about the meaning of life, the reality of
perception, politics and philosophy and religion and
whatever. Some days, we'd wander back to campus
just as the sun was coming up.
I'd see the fingers of dawn rise in the east, and I'd
crawl into bed to sleep for 7 hours before class.

I'm not 20 anymore. Earlier this week,
I was up late after the board meeting on Wednesday -
I'm always wired after we meet,
and then I woke up early - before sunrise.
And went back to sleep, contrary to the advice of this
morning's reading.
I slept until 9 - and was shocked when I woke up.
I never sleep that late anymore.

No, depending on the time of year and the time that school starts, I'm up before the sunrise with sufficient regularity that it isn't a surprise anymore. And more often than not, I get to see the new light of day reflect off the Rock River, saying to the world, hello again. As dawn flings itself up swirling with clouds and color and birdsong.

Arise and greet the day!
Sing a song of gladness.
A new day dawns
see that life abounds.

This is the song of morning; this is the celebration.
The sun, harbinger of the new day,
comes to us.
The new day!
The new beginning!
Alleluia!

The morning comes.
Day is a breaking in my soul.
This is the metaphor most at the heart of Easter:
Spring after winter, sure,
that, but even more so, day after night.
The dawn after the darkness,
and the light of hope after the night of despair.

Very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen - that's the way the gospel of Mark tells it - very early, but the sun has risen, the women go to the tomb. That have spent the Sabbath and the night in grief: our leader, our brother, has been killed.

They come to anoint the body,
but the body is not there.
The man who sits there says, do not be afraid,
for he has risen.

There's a lot of the "do not be afraid"
when it comes to Jesus, isn't there?
The angels to the shepherds -
do not be afraid for I bring you tidings of great joy.
Do not be afraid, for he is risen.

Yet they are afraid.
The unknown, the mysterious, the sacred, the
powerful, the message that comes to change how
things are:
this is frightening.
The morning, dawn, flings itself up; and we can be
afraid. We can be afraid.

Another day?
Lord, have mercy.
I'm not ready for this day.
I can't handle this day.
Is it morning already?
I want to go back to sleep.

This is serious business,
but I have to pause to tell you a cringe-worthy joke I
heard.
Why was the Easter Bunny wearing shades?
Because the son had risen.

The morning is the powerful metaphor at work in the
Easter story.

And the morning isn't always good news.
It isn't always easy.
We might be afraid.
We might be terrified.
We might think, I can't do this.

Don't go back to sleep.
Arise and greet the day.
I mean this metaphorically.
I mean this spiritually.
Can we arise and greet the day?
Can we rise?
Can we have a resurrection ourselves?
Can we rise?

Can we say, today is a fresh start.
It's a new day.

Maybe you've always been one to doubt your own
power.
Maybe, on this new day, you believe in yourself.

Maybe you've always thought that it was your job to
make everyone else happy.
Maybe, on this new day, you do something that will
make you happy.

Maybe you've always been a cynic about the world.
Maybe, on this day, you make a list of ten things to
celebrate.

Maybe you're captured by an addiction.
Maybe this new day is the first day of your sobriety.

Maybe you're stuck in a relationship that doesn't work,
at all.

Maybe this new day is the day you say, this changes or
I go.

Maybe you're on the verge of falling in love.

Maybe, on this day, you let yourself fall - and stop
holding back.

Maybe you've never believed in anything like holiness
or sacredness.

Maybe, on this day, you let some mystery into your
heart.

Maybe you've always been holding your breath.

Maybe today is the day you start breathing from the
bottom of your toes.

Today is a new day!

Arise and greet the day!

Sing alleluia!

Embrace possibility; embrace the new; don't be afraid!

Thursday, the day I accidentally slept in,
is my writing day.

And it was a full day - I'll come back to that -
so I didn't get writing until the afternoon.

I went out, as I often do - coffee shops, bars, are
great places to write -
and the snow was falling.

People were slipping and sliding and I thought,
geez, I'm supposed to write a sermon about the glory
of the morning,

and Easter, and spring and hope and alleluia,

and it is snowing. Come on!

But one of my colleagues shared this reflection:

Easter, 1982, by Robert Walsh.

The light green shoots of blossoms-to-have-been are out of sight under the drifting snow. Gale force winds are rattling the old house. The temperature is far below freezing. Nature is not cooperating with preparations for Easter.

Ha! That's true again, isn't it? Walsh continues:

The storm evokes the spiritual quality of Good Friday more than Easter. New life will appear, but not without strife . . .

The seasons are more reliable in these matters than human nature. For we, individually and collectively, can choose between love and indifference, between commitment and self-absorption, between peace and war. And we have often chosen the coldness.

We have, haven't we? We have more often chosen the coldness.

Chose to stay asleep, to give into despair, or habit, rather than to arise and greet the day.

We have. So it isn't inevitable.

Hope, I mean, it isn't inevitable.

Walsh continues:

The motions of the spheres will produce a sunrise, but the springtime of the spirit, the springtime of love and justice and peace, depends on our human response to the gift of life.

The motions of the spheres will produce a sunrise,
but the springtime of the spirit,
the morning of the spirit,
of love and justice and peace,
depends on us.

We choose. Be not afraid; but we often are.

Thursday was a full day.
Earlier that afternoon, as a member of the board of
Rockford Promise,
I went to a press conference we had.
We announced four scholarship winners -
four young women, graduates of Jefferson and East
high,
who got full scholarships - two to Rockford University,
two to Rock Valley College.
The hope is that next year it'll be 8, then more and
more.
The winners are all from the Midtown neighborhood,
and they're all first-generation college students.
The first in their family to go.
And what they've been through to get to a high school
graduation? Amazing.
Let alone to get into college.

I was sitting there, as the dignitaries spoke and the
students smiled and their parents and siblings felt joy
and relief and hope - and thinking about Easter.
About - arise and greet the day.
About - do not be afraid.
A new day.
Are these 18-year-old students afraid?
Of course they are.

Of course!

No one in their family knows what college is like.
The horizon is further than anyone has looked.
And they are full of hope.
Arise and greet the day.

If they can, you can.

The motions of the spheres will produce a sunrise, but
the springtime of the spirit, the springtime of love and
justice and peace, depends on our human response to
the gift of life.

Arise and greet the day -
embrace hope and possibility. Don't be afraid.

Not because the sun has risen,
it'll do that every day,
as the earth turns, over and over again.
But because you have risen.
Because you have made a human response to the gift
of life.
Because you have embraced the possibility of mystery
and love and joy.
Because you have awoken to your new life.

This is what I want to say:
the tomb is empty.
That's the story. The tomb is empty.

I used to enjoy the night, and I still do.
But it is also during the night that I have my worst
fears.
That I tremble for what my life might be,

for what our country might be, for what the world
might be.

It is when I fear.

It is when the tomb seems most real.

But the truth of the story is this:

that tomb is empty.

The morning is real.

The hope is real.

The fear can consume us, if we let it,
but we don't have to let it.

You don't have to live in fear.

You can live in hope.

You can sing dirges or you can sing anthems,
and it is up to you -

it is a choice of the human spirit.

You can go back to sleep - not every once in a while,
but every day -

or you can wake up.

You can face your fears head on, take life as it is,
and decide to make the best of the day that is before
you. That's up to you.

This is what I want to say:
the new day is a moment of liberation.

It is a moment of freedom.

Forget what has been.

It is a new day! It is a new life! It is a new journey!

It is a moment of liberation.

Who do you want to be today?

As each day is a re-creation of the earth,
each day can be a re-creation of your life.

Break the bad habit.

Turn over the new leaf.
What's stopping you?
What are you waiting for?

Stop dreaming and start living.
Tell your children that they can be anyone they want to be.
Believe in the possibility of your town, your city, the world.
Put on your running shoes and start.
Plant sequoias.
Say, ok, this is what my body can do now,
so let me do what I can do,
instead of wishing I was 20 again.
Begin again.
Forgive someone who doesn't deserve it.
Tell the person that you love that you love them.
Do it today.

Make a springtime in your soul.
Make a morning in your heart.
Arise and greet the day!
Don't go back to sleep.
Day is a-breaking,
day is a-breaking in the soul;
let day break in your soul,
let day break in your soul,
and let us rise -
let us rise and greet the day,
the new day which is before us,
the new life which is before us.
Let us rise;
let us rise in body and in spirit, and let us sing.