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Losing Our Way Into Resurrection

This is a hard teaching. As one pastor noted, it can be challenging to discern what this all means for our lives. It can be difficult to imagine how it is made flesh in and for us.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. Who can blame him? It is too relatable. Suffering, rejection, and loss cannot be the way of God's anointed. Or so we tell ourselves. We prefer glory. Wonder. Beauty. Majesty. Triumph. Those who are successful. And- of course, winning. Not all of this talk of dying and rising and losing our lives to find them.

It was Luther who said we find God hidden under the crooked sign of the opposite. Still, if you are anything like me it can seem a bit irresponsible to pray what we did a few minutes ago: "Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son." *Glory* in the cross. No wonder Paul called it foolish.

There is a recent book titled, *Everyday Armageddons*; stories on death, dying, God, and waste¹. An apt book for Lent. Even if it is uncomfortable to talk about. The author reflects on some of those places in our world where life is ending, or has ended. Often those places are not out in the open but hidden away. The horror and shame is too much. This book takes us to nursing homes and hospitals mostly. Their broken bodies lie down where most of us don't have to gaze at them with too much regularity. We must not romanticize or tokenize those beloved children of God or somehow sentimentalize or spiritualize suffering. Still, what does it mean that God is born there and made flesh among them? In fractured bodies and places passed over. Where bodies are cruciform. What does that mean for our own dying bodies (even when we refuse to acknowledge that truth) and our wounded planet?

In what other direction might we look if we know that God is hidden in the places where the world is scandalized and we try to fight? What might happen if we stare directly into the rooms and faces the world turns away in horror just as we follow and bow toward the instrument of shameful death that is for us the means of life?

I was listening to a podcast this week that was discussing current events in Chicago, and so they started talking about the weather. The comment that struck me was, "it is not supposed to be almost 70 degrees when there are no leaves on the trees." I was having a conversation with

¹ *Everyday Armageddons; Stories and Reflections on Death, Dying, God, and Waste* by Matthew Holmes and Thomas R. Gaulke

someone and I realized I had been carrying low grade climate anxiety in my body this week. Staring down into the future of our ailing planet can make you feel stuck. What can one person do to combat something so big.

There is the Middle East, Ukraine, and a thousand other things.

We all feel stuck in one way or another. Either by the crises that afflict our world, by the sin of our own hearts that builds barriers between our current realities and the future we are called to in baptism. Or simply the world as it is.

The relationship that seems to be at a stand still. The gap between where we are and where we imagined we would be by this time in our career, family, retirement, life. The chasm between our values and our actions. Shame that gets wrapped around us by forces within and without.

It is easy to admit the past or present attempt to keep us in their prisons. We don't see a way forward or out on our own. A tomorrow different from today seems impossible.

Like Abraham, we look at all those places where a future beyond our current circumstances seems impossible and, "as good as dead" is as apt a description as anything else.

Thankfully the God who addresses us each day is the one who does God's best work with those as good as dead and at the end of themselves. Actually this God is the one who gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist. This is God's core identity.

This word creates. Future. Possibilities. New creation. This word is the one who is on his way to Jerusalem, whose destination is among the cursed ones on the tree outside the city, and whom God will raise up on the third day. The God who raised Jesus from the dead is the one who can make a unilateral promise of a future for you and this whole weary cosmos. Here we can audaciously quote Buechner with the confidence of the crucified and risen one: the worst thing is never the last thing. And the worst thing never has to define you either.

This God does God's best work in the places long abandoned, forgotten, and passed over in your life. Where are those places God is breaking open new life in the fractured spaces of the church and the world? We go to those places and see what God will do on the other side of dead ends and places where stones have sealed shut long occupied tombs.

This God who sought out Abraham and Sarah is always searching for you. Moving towards you. Being made alive again for you under the sign of the opposite. In loosening our grip and losing our life. Taking the last place. Giving up your position. Letting others go ahead of you. Emptying yourself.

Those every day Armageddon's? Looking and going there, and staying awhile becomes a habit as we reverence the cross. After all, we are marked with it. We take Christ's broken body into ours. Becoming what we receive.

This is a hard teaching. Our Lenten path. Baptismal calling and inheritance. The cross. The way to resurrection on both sides of the grave.