

I want to deliver an Easter message to you today that is both true to the Scriptural account of the resurrection, as well as a message that is real and down to earth, a message that connects with your heart. What I want to say to you this morning, and what I hope you will hear and receive is this - Easter means that everything is going to be okay.

Life in this world is a mixed bag of worry and calm, trust and fear. Some days are better than others, aren't they? Some days you can actually rest in the knowledge that God loves you and that He's got the whole world in His hands. Other days are dark and tense and your problems consume you; these are the days that threaten to undo you.

There is an Irish poet who says, "*Some days take less but most days take more/ Some slip through your fingers and onto the floor.*" If your floor is like mine, there are broken pieces of broken days still waiting to be swept up. In this life, some days are better than others.

Easter means that the better days will prevail. This is because God entered into the world of good days and bad days and experienced them Himself. There was no worse day than Good Friday - the day Jesus was crucified. There was no better day than day Jesus was raised from the dead. Easter means that the better day will prevail. Your floor will finally be swept clean, every shard, every crumb, every fragment. Easter means that everything is going to be okay.

I'm fully aware that this message might seem naïve at best and irresponsible avoidance of the world's real problems at worst. Or it may sound like a Freudian infantile wish for an Almighty Father to come and take care of everything and make everything okay. If you are thinking these things, you are not alone and you are not the first to think them.

This is what the disciples thought when they first heard the news that Jesus wasn't dead, that He was alive, that everything was going to be okay. In fact, the Scripture says, "*these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.*"

I'm also fully aware that some days the tale that life tells is worse than an idle tale - it is a darker tale. Some days you are certain of Macbeth's analysis - "*Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.*" When Jesus was "handed over to sinners" and "crucified" as the angel reminds the women in today's gospel, the disciples must have thought that all they experienced - the healing and teaching and preaching and miracles - were nothing but sound and fury, signifying nothing.

When the women came and told them that everything was going to be okay, the disciples just couldn't buy it. What they knew to be true was Jesus' arrest, their own abandonment of their Lord, his joke of a trial, his torture, his execution, and the dead end of all their hopes. Their movement was dead and buried in the tomb along with the one they thought would be their Messiah. They had wasted 3 years of their lives with a traveling preacher.

Who can blame the disciples? I know that place of despair, don't you? The despair you feel in a bitter divorce, an addicted child, an absent father, the death of your wife, a recidivistic sin, the wars and rumors of wars in a divided world. Or maybe it's just another lonely Tuesday afternoon or another 3am and you're still awake. Some days it is this darkness that seems to be all that is true. To say that everything is going to be okay seems like an idle tale not to be believed.

And yet, I want to say it again. Easter means that everything is going to be okay. Yes, Jesus was handed over to sinners. Yes, Jesus was crucified. But on the third day he rose! When the women look for the dead body of their Lord, the angel asks, "*Why do you look for the living among the dead?*" he asks. And the women remember Jesus' own promise that the Son of Man would be raised from the dead. Would Jesus, who is Way, the Truth, and the Life tell an idle tale?

One of literature's most moving examples of this message is found in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Near the end of the Trilogy, Frodo has borne the Ring of Power through darkness and suffering unimaginable and has hurled the ring into the fire to be destroyed. The Kingdom of Mordor with its evil and death has finally imploded. Frodo and Sam, his faithful friend, having fulfilled their impossible task, collapse in exhaustion and prepare to die. Tolkien says it is "*the end of all things.*" Frodo and Sam faint from their wounds and exhaustion; they see no more.

But then, on a bright sunny morning days later, Sam wakes up in a soft bed. The time is early April, a morning exactly like this very Easter morning in Charlottesville. Over Sam's bed "*gently swayed wide beechen boughs, and through their young leaves sunlight glimmered, green and gold. All air was full of a sweet scent.*"

Then Sam's astonishment increases as he sees Mr. Frodo standing beside him. He also hears Gandalf the wise wizard, the one Sam thought was dead in a tomb, ask, "*Well, Master Samwise, how do you feel?*" Tolkien says, "*Sam lay back, stared with open mouth, and for a moment, between bewilderment and great joy, he could not answer. At last he gasped: 'Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself.'*" Then Sam asks, "*Is everything sad going to come untrue?*"

Sam's question, "Is everything sad going to come untrue?" is the great Easter question. And the great Easter answer is "Yes!" – everything sad is going to come untrue. Easter means that everything is going to be okay.

Easter doesn't mean that everything is okay now or that there is no sadness now, no bad days now, no hurt now. That is nonsense. But the very fact that the women do discover that the Lord is risen means that everything is going to be okay. Everything sad is going to come untrue.

This is an Easter promise that connects directly with my heart and my own experience. My family is like any other family – acquainted with sadness and suffering, needing assurance that everything is going to be okay. This is true in general and true in particular with my brother-in-law, Robbie.

Robbie was my wife Christie's older brother. Robbie was 6 foot 4 inches, dark and handsome – he had dark auburn hair and a full beard. He had magnetic looks. An artist once asked him to pose as Jesus! He had a carefree personality; everybody loved Robbie. Robbie loved the beach, drove SUV's before they were called SUV's, he was always where the excitement was. When Christie got accepted at UVA, Robbie took her to Madison Square Garden in New York to see the Hoo's play in the NIT finals.

In our living room, we have a 12x10 picture of Robbie on the docks of Cape Hatteras. He is healthy, trim and strong, suntanned, in his cut off khaki shorts and sun-faded t-shirt. He has just returned from a deep-sea fishing trip and is holding up a 7 foot blue marlin. He looks like a cross between Jesus and Ernest Hemingway, his muscles taut with the fish's prodigious weight. Clearly, this is one of Robbie's better days.

Robbie's better days did not last. As Robbie grew older he struggled with alcoholism. Because of this disease, the days grew darker for Robbie and his family. At one point Robbie confessed to me, "Paul, this thing is a monster. It's just too big for me." As Robbie suffered, we suffered with him.

What Robbie called his darkest night happened during a stint in rehab. He was alone in a detox room, facing his demons by himself. It was 3 in the morning and he was terrified. Robbie was never a church-goer – you might see him Christmas and Easter every other year. But in that dark night Robbie experienced light and hope and love. Telling his tale afterward, he said, "*This sounds really weird, but in that awful night I felt Jesus with me. He came to me. I knew everything was going to be okay.*"

Robbie died about a year later. The monster was finally too big for him. He died alone, but he was not by himself. Christie has a vivid image of Jesus cradling Robbie as he died. I imagine Jesus' face close to Robbie's, saying, "*Don't be afraid. In my Father's house there are many rooms. This is no idle tale. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go and prepare a place for you?*"

Easter means that we do not look for Robbie among the dead; we look for him among the living. Easter means that Robbie is alive with Jesus, fit and strong and

smiling on the everlasting docks, free of his and every other monster. Easter means that for Robbie, for us, for you, and for the world that Jesus came not to condemn but to save, *everything is going to be okay*. The Better Day will prevail.

Amen.