

EASTER SUNDAY
APRIL 20, 2014

FIRST, MARSHALL
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

ACTS 10:34-43; PSALM 118:1-2, 14-24; COLOSSIANS 3:1-4; MATTHEW 28:1-10
Great Expectations

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

The dawning of this delightful day is filled with great expectations.

From children searching for baskets crammed with candy,
to families formulating how to fix those fabulous feasts,
to folks who just want some warmth and sun –
today promises to be a **great** celebration of life.

And from musicians and ministers, to acolytes and altar guild members,
to ushers and decorators, this is a day when **congregations** create a great
celebration of **new** life...new life in Christ Jesus our Lord. The air is
almost **electric** with a sense of *great expectations*.

But that comes as no surprise to anyone: we all know that life is filled
with the anticipation of things to come – both good and bad. From a
child's **first** day at **school** – to their first visit to the **principal's** office;
and from our hope of **enjoying some** days – to our **relief** when **others**
are finally **over**; even our **ordinary** days are defined by expectations.

It's a part of this great circle called life in which:

Parents have hopes for a brand-new baby –
even as **adult children** have **pain** at **burying** mom or dad.

A **newly married couple** excitedly plans for the future –
even as those of us with **gray/no! hair** wonder what the future will bring.

A **congregation** is **alive** with youth, bible studies, music and worship –
even as they are **challenged** to find the **money** to pay the **bills**.
We all plan our lives around specific expectations.

And though we **sometimes** think they **should** have been, the **followers**
of **Jesus** were no different. In **fact**, I'd say they had a **better** excuse
than the **rest** of us! *They had good reason:*
-to **envision** a **grand kingdom** ruled by their Lord;
-to have **hope** for **loved** ones who were **sick**;
-to **dream** about positions of **power** in the coming kingdom, and
-to make plans for those bloody Romans who caused them so much pain.

And yet...all of **those** great expectations were dashed against the rocks
with Jesus' death on the cross. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,
their visions, their hopes, their dreams for life...had died.

The women who went to the tomb that first Easter morning were on a **painful** mission of duty and love. Their **eyes** ached from that **dark night** of **tears**, and their **hearts** ached from a **nightmare** of **fears**. They expected to find...the dead body of the man in whom they had dared to dream.

Great expectations indeed...

The famous Minnesota story-teller, Garrison Keillor, played with this theme in a ballad he wrote after receiving a letter from a **disillusioned** fan. A woman had written him describing her **anticipation** of finally getting the chance to **see his show...and** describing her sense of **dis-satisfaction** with what she saw. It had **nothing** to do with his performance, the theater, the audience or the guests on the show.

Her disappointment had **nothing** to do with the **quality** of the **experience**, but **everything** to do with the fact that Garrison Keillor was not **nearly** as **handsome** as the woman had **imagined!** She wrote that her expectations, which had been built on months of listening to his engaging voice on the radio, were dashed to pieces the moment this tall, gangly, bespectacled man walked on stage and introduced himself. He humorously entitled his ballad, "Please, Lord, **Don't** Let *That* Be *Him!*"

So we cannot fault the disciples for becoming **disillusioned**,
for going into **hiding** after Jesus' death,
for **fearing** the **authorities**,
for dreading a **future** without Jesus...

The same is true with the **women**. They set out expecting to find just the cold, dead body of the man they had once believed had brought a grand purpose for life. What they **expected**, is **not** what they **found**.

And then the angel greets them with that amazing, astonishing, existence-altering announcement: *You are looking for Jesus who was crucified...he is not here; for he has been raised!* What they **found** was **clearly nowhere** close to what they **expected**.

We can only imagine the looks of bewilderment, bafflement, perplexity and puzzlement on the faces of those brave, devoted women. Having just **awakened** from **sleep**, they must have felt as if they were **still dreaming**. *Come and see where he lay, continued the angel, Then go quickly and tell his disciples that Jesus has been raised from the dead.*

Muddled and mystified, but empowered and energized, they dared once more to open their hearts to the possible miracle of God's good grace. The tomb? It was opened! Jesus' body? It was gone! The Messenger? An alarming angel...but one with an amazing announcement!

And then, the most **sur**-real, **un**-real experience of their existence: they are met by the risen Lord himself! The women's great expectations had not come to pass...but had, in fact, been entirely **surpassed**... **incredibly, amazingly, unbelievably** surpassed!

So God had great expectations for those women:

- to hear the incredible words of resurrection.
- to be the very first messengers of Easter story.
- to share this Good News with the grief-stricken disciples.

And this is very good news – it's God's **best** word of good news, a word that can truly lift up our expectations for life. For not only has God:

- endured the worst that life can offer,
- accepted this world's cruelty and abuse,
- walked alone through that valley of the shadow of death,

But God has also:

- broken death's grip of fear on our lives,
- promised to wipe every tear from our eyes,
- vowed to walk beside us through that valley of shadows,
- and assured us that he will be the gift of life, and love and peace for all the world to see.

As the angel sent the women off with a **new** set of great expectations, so God sends **us** off with **these** same expectations, that you and I will share this very good news with all the world – in all that we do and say. So one more time, let's join in our opening litany, with all the power of God's Spirit ringing in our ears. Let's affirm the very good news of this great and wonderful day:

P: Christ is risen!

C: He is risen, indeed!!!