

I have been privileged in my lifetime to have seen two marriage proposals in a restaurant, just like you see in the movies.

One I especially remember because my wife and I were celebrating our own wedding anniversary; the young man got up, then dropped to one knee by the table.

I told my wife to turn around and look, and with all the other diners, a sudden hush throughout the restaurant as we watched the ring come out of his pocket; we couldn't hear but we knew what he was saying, the look on her face: amazed, unexpected, excited, the joy of love in all its glory...and they kissed, she had said, “YES!”

We all applauded, returned to our own meal, but now it had been seasoned with the sweet spice of love and hope and surprised joy!

But what if...what if she had said ‘No’?

Can you imagine how that young man would have felt? Heartbroken, humiliated with all of us looking on, ‘down-on-one-knee-ready-to-crawl-under-the-table’ if she had said, “NO”.

All his dreams about how life was going to be, his love for her cast aside, everything he had come to believe about her, buried with a ‘No’.

I wonder if that's how the women felt that early morning. The world had said ‘no’ to Jesus: crucified, dead, buried.

These women, the disciples, his followers had put all their hopes and dreams on him, in his message, in the way he lived, what he did for so many hurting, sorrowing, fearful people.

But now, heartbroken, humiliated by the jeering crowds and abusive Roman soldiers, here they are walking through the shadows.

They come to the tomb where Jesus had been signed, sealed, and delivered to death, where they had buried their own hearts full of love for their Lord.

We've all walked that path, a path the world always seems to be leading us down. Think about it, the world was still ‘Easter-less’ at that moment.

The ‘no’ of death was the last word they had heard late that Friday afternoon.

They walked the path that has been walked in too many school hallways, remembered in the sanctuary of Emanuel Church in Charleston and in too many other settings, a path followed in so many neighborhoods and streets and homes in the valley of the shadows of death.

Maybe we've felt that way, too, as if the world were ‘Easter-less’: those fears, those burdens, the worries, the troubles, the shadows that darken our lives.

Some of them of our own making and we can't stop kicking ourselves for it.

Or maybe somebody else is to blame and we can't get past it, still kicking them while we're down.

Or maybe we're just mad at God for something; things haven't worked out for us or somebody we love, and we can't do anything about, and we thought God was in those plans for good.

Just like those women on their way to the tomb.

They knew Jesus was God's plan for good, and now, today, our day, this day some 2000 years ago, they are, as the wonderful preacher Barbara Brown Taylor titled her book, *Learning to Walk in The Dark*.

Now we might think of that as a negative, the dark, the darkness, and when you look up dark and darkness in a dictionary, it seems to bear that out.

But when you go back and read the biblical stories, it's a different story.

In Genesis, the darkness is where God begins working creation. In Exodus, God promises to come to Moses in a dark cloud on Mount Sinai.

In other words, the darkness is a divine dwelling place for God.

Abraham meets God in the darkness, Jacob wrestles God in the middle of the night, and it was while shepherd watched their flocks at night that angels announced the birth of Jesus.

There's so much that happens in the dark that is essential to the Christian story, like the story of these women on their way to the tomb.

I like the way Reverend Taylor says it: "If you are willing to enter the cloud of unknowing and meet God in the dark, maybe even the dark of a tomb, you might be in for a surprise."

You might be in for a surprise, like a young man dropping to a knee beside a restaurant table, and looking into the eyes of love, hears a grand and glorious gift of new life, YES!

Easter is the day God says 'Yes!'

Easter is the day God says 'yes' to our own surprise of resurrection, a day of new beginnings, a day of new commitments; that you and I are raised from our tombs of selfishness and pride; the burial cloths of fear and greed tossed aside.

We are surprised by the resurrection, as Isaiah the prophet said it centuries before that first Easter, God has treasure for us in the darkness!

Look at Peter, who had abandoned Jesus, denied knowing Jesus, yet in the darkness saw the treasure of the empty tomb, and yet was brought back to life in Jesus, with Jesus, for Jesus.

That's why he starts his letter, I like the way Eugene Peterson translates Peter's beginning words of our Scripture reading: *"What a God we have! And how fortunate we are to have him, this Father of our Master Jesus! Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we've been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for..."*

Easter is the day God says, "Yes!"

Not only for what we believe, but 'yes' for resurrection people like you and me to be something and to do something!

Even more than marriage proposals, I have been privileged to read and hear statements of faith from young men and women in Confirmation Classes as they have said 'yes' to joining the church.

And let me tell you, in churches I've served from Virginia to Texas, from Missouri to the Florida coast and all the states in between, and I know it will be the same with our own confirmands as they come before the Session next month: "Somebody is doing something right."

Across the board, these 8th and 9th Graders, in their own words, are saying, "This is what I believe, and this is what I must do to live as a Christian."

As one confirmand wrote in their confirmation statement, "This is big stuff, I mean this might end up in a sermon one day."

Well, this is the day!

This young person went on to say how a walk during a Confirmation Class retreat was a defining faith moment, and I quote, "I often think about that day...and that God was there walking with me on that path. Helping me when I faltered or stumbled."

It's true for 8th and 9th Graders, for women on the way to the tomb, for you and me as we walk our faith. We all falter and stumble, and God is there helping.

As another confirmand put it, "It may seem that at times we are far from God and everything is gray, but God's word can always be found in the people who follow Jesus' teachings."

That's exactly what Matthew is telling us as he ends the Easter story: the people who follow Jesus' teaching are to go to Galilee, that's what he says, where Jesus, God's word can be found.

"Going to Galilee" means going to where you and I live, our Galilee, our home, our school, where we play, where we work, with our friends and neighbors, with all that's going on in our world.

And let's be clear: the world is just as cruel now as it was then, far from God and everything gray, the evil in all our hearts still crucifying goodness.

But what our confirmand said, what Matthew is telling us, the world is waiting for that great word of God's 'yes':

- a word that does not allow us to stand by while men and women and children suffer the violence of this world, deprived of justice and mercy;
- a word in which pain and sorrow will always find compassion and hope;
- a word that reflects the clear shining light of the risen Lord, so we see who we ourselves can be, to fulfill our ministry as brothers and sisters of the risen Christ.

The ultimate test of God's 'yes' is not how we worship on Easter once a year, but how we live that 'yes' tomorrow, in the Galilee where you and I live and where Jesus waits for us.

Jesus didn't die to make God's love possible, but to make that love visible and to show us how far that love can go...from Friday on the cross to Sunday at the tomb and on to Monday where you and I live.

So now, it is time for us to get ready to go to our Monday, to walk to our Galilee, to where we live as resurrection people.

When we get there, I want you to be able to say as another confirmand said of their own special faith walk:

"I could feel God that day. God was there, telling me to slow down and take a look around and marvel at the beautiful world he created. So I did, and now I look for it every day. It makes the day easier if you just take some time to look at the world around you. You are special. God made everything that fell into place fall into place for you."

Easter is the day God said 'yes' and "made everything that fell into place fall into place for you".

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.