

“No Road Map for This”
Matthew 28:1-10
Easter Sunday

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Westminster, Greenville
Ben Dorr

In Tod Bolsinger’s book, *Canoeing the Mountains*,
Bolsinger takes a look at the church in the 21st century—
through the lens of the Lewis & Clark expedition of the 19th century.

He describes the moment when Meriwether Lewis
comes upon the mouth of the Missouri River.

Lewis believes that he has found what generations of explorers before him
were looking for but could never find: the Northwest Passage.

“Fifteen months of hard travel had led to this moment...” Bolsinger writes.

*Meriwether Lewis recalled all that he had endured:
A dark, cold winter. Grizzly bears...
The death of a companion.*

But Lewis was sure that at that moment, “he would walk up the hill, look
down a gentle slope that would take his men half a day to cross with their canoes
on their backs, and then they would see” the body of water that would connect the
Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean.

Of course, what Meriwether Lewis learned when he walked up the hill—was
that there was no Northwest Passage...

“In front of him was not a gentle slope...but the Rocky Mountains.

And at that moment, everything that Meriwether Lewis assumed about his
journey changed.”

“What lay before [Lewis and his companions] was nothing like what was
behind them. There were no experts, no maps...”

to see them through.

They were staring at MOUNTAINS...

and they had brought canoes.¹

I wonder if any of us have felt like Meriwether Lewis in recent weeks—
staring at unforeseen mountains to climb,
when we were expecting gentle streams this spring,
looking at a road in front of us that feels NOTHING
like the road we left behind us.

I know I did not expect a Lenten journey this year that would lead to empty pews on Easter Sunday!

And yet, while I'm very sad not to be able to see all of you in person on this Easter Day, there's something about THIS Easter that makes me think we're a lot closer to the FIRST Easter than we've ever been before.

When the women arrive at the tomb on that first Easter, they quickly learn that the world that lay behind them looks NOTHING like the world that lies before them.

Matthew writes: “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake...”

ONLY Matthew tells us that Easter means earthquake!

Of course, Matthew is not simply describing a seismological event. He's describing a THEOLOGICAL event.

It's Matthew's way of saying there's been a BREAK with the world those women used to know, and they have—
unknowingly—entered an entirely NEW WORLD.

It's a world, according to the angel,
in which the old maps,

¹ Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015.

the old rules,
the old ways of navigating life no longer apply...

“...you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised.”

As one commentator puts it:

“Somewhere along the path to the cemetery...[the women] left one world and entered another. Without even knowing they had crossed the border, they left the old world, where hope is in constant danger, and might makes right, and peace has little chance, and the rich get richer...and dead people stay dead, and they entered the startling and breathtaking world of resurrection and life.”²

Have you ever felt the tension between those two worlds?

These days, I think the FEAR that’s just below the surface,
the uncertainty about what tomorrow will bring,
it really raises the stakes when it comes
to how we see the world right now...
when it comes to WHICH WORLD
we decide to live in right now...

Easter makes the disorienting claim that the world of might makes right, and dead people stay dead—it’s NOT the real world.

There’s a marvelous scene toward the end of C.S. Lewis’ book, *The Last Battle*.

A group of dwarves are sitting huddled together in a tight little knot, thinking that they are pitch black, stinking stable. When the truth is that they are in the midst of an endless, grassy green countryside, with the sun shining and blue skies overhead.

Aslan, that great lion who for Lewis is the Christ-figure in these tales—he is there, with those dwarves.

² Thomas G. Long, *Matthew*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.

He offers them food. They take it for garbage.
 He offers them wine. They think it's ditch-water.³

Their fears have SHRUNK their world, so much so that those dwarves cannot see the real world in which they truly live.

“Do not be afraid,” the angel said to the women on that first Easter long ago.

Do not be afraid.

May I make a suggestion, of one thing those words might mean for us, on this unusual Easter day?

Do not live in a smaller world than the one God has given you.⁴

Now that may seem like a strange suggestion for this Easter.

Don't live in a smaller world than the one that God has given us?

When most of us are confined to our homes most of the time, standing at least 6 feet from neighbors and strangers at all times—it may seem like our worlds have already become really, REALLY small.

Don't misunderstand.

I'm not telling you to STOP social distancing.

The most faithful thing most of us can do is stay home as much as we can.

But in the midst of being WHEREVER we are, we do not have to give in to the fear...

Do not live in a smaller world than the one God has given you.

Have you ever seen someone do it?

³ C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 1956. For this reference, I am indebted to Frederick Buecher's book, *Telling Secrets*, New York: HarperCollins, 1991.

⁴ I am indebted to a sermon by the Rev. Mark Ramsey for this phrase.

Have you ever seen someone refuse to live in a smaller world than the one that God has given them?

Back in 1994, the World Cup for men's soccer was held here in the United States. In the second game of the opening round, the U.S. team faced Colombia.

With the score knotted at zeros, Colombian defender Andres Escobar tried to deflect a ball out of bounds. But instead of kicking it out, he accidentally kicked the ball into his own goal.

It gave the U.S. a 1-0 lead, and Colombia never recovered. They lost the match, and they ended up not qualifying for the second round of play.

Escobar, the captain, an exquisite player, was devastated.

What was difficult for Escobar, however, soon became tragic.

Colombian drug traffickers had bet lots of money on Colombia to win the World Cup.

Shortly after returning to Colombia, Escobar was at a local club when he was shot and killed by a drug cartel. It was a death that rocked the country. Thousands lined the street with Escobar's coffin, and the President made a speech to the country, with Escobar's grieving family in the front row.

How does one go on, in the face of such a senseless killing?

Escobar grew up in a devoutly Catholic household, and one could see that faith at work in his adult years. According to one person, Escobar was someone who believed that soccer fields could be places of forgiveness. In a land that was SOAKED with violence, Escobar saw soccer as offering a different world of play and peace.

And so it happened, after his team was eliminated, Escobar wrote a letter to his country, published in a national newspaper.

The end of the letter went like this:

“Let us please maintain respect.
 My warmest regards to everyone.
 We’ll see each other again soon, because life doesn’t end here.”

What Escobar had no way of knowing was that those words—
“life doesn’t end here”—
 would still be hanging like a balloon in the air,
 after he was killed:

Life does not end here.

Those five words became a beacon of hope for all who knew him...

His fiancé was enraged by his death...but eventually, she refused to live with anger—she said NO to the world of bitterness, a world so much smaller than the one God had given her.

“Eventually,” she said, “life leads to Andres’ words. No matter how difficult, we must stand back up.

Spend our time trying to stop someone else’s suffering.

Life doesn’t end here.”⁵

Of course, that’s what the women at the empty tomb discovered too: Life does not end here, with a crucifixion. God’s love does not end with a senseless, unjust death.

And the same is true for us.
 God’s love and the life God calls us to live...they do not end here.

Not with an empty church on Easter.
 Not with a school year cut short.
 Not with a job that’s suddenly disappeared.
 Not with an unexpected diagnosis.
 Not with a global pandemic.

⁵ This story comes from “The Two Escobars,” a documentary in ESPN’s “30 for 30” series.

God's love does not end here.
Christ is risen, despair and death have been defeated.

So do not live in a smaller world than the one that God has given you...

The response of the women is a model for all of us:

"...go quickly," the angel says, "and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead...'"

And that's what they did.

"So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy..."

Did you catch that?
In the midst of their fears, they took the next faithful step.

They did not know what it would mean.
They did not know where it would lead.
But they took that next step, not letting their fears triumph over their trust in the living God...

I remember reading, not too long ago, a family history story.

The writer was someone that some of you know: the retired professor of preaching, Tom Long.

Long has family roots here in South Carolina, and when Tom Long was a child, he used to love looking at the constellation of family portraits in the "sitting room" of his grandmother's South Carolina home.

In the middle of the cluster of photographs was one from the Civil War. It was of a young man dressed in the uniform of a Union army officer.

"Needless to say," Long writes, "this was very unusual—the portrait of a Yankee soldier in a place of honor on the wall" of his grandmother's home?

One day, Long's grandmother told him the story behind that photograph. The man in the photo was a minister, a chaplain in the Union Army.

In May, 1862, after the battle at Williamsburg, Virginia, this chaplain rode out onto the field to see if there were any wounded troops. He discovered a 19-year-old Confederate soldier, lying in a ditch, slowly bleeding to death from his leg.

The chaplain put this soldier on his horse, took him to a medical tent, where a surgeon amputated the leg at the knee, saving the young man's life.

That 19-year-old Confederate soldier not only grew up to become a minister, and a teacher, and a college president. He also ended up being Tom Long's great-grandfather.

His name was William Moffatt Grier.⁶

Now why do I share that?

Well, I told you a while back about a pastor in my own life who encouraged—or rather, literally pushed me to go to seminary when I was reluctant to go.

That pastor who had this significant impact on my life—he was once a student of Tom Long's, and Long had a significant impact on his life and ministry.

In other words, God shaped my life through a person shaped by another person's life and faith, and that person owed his own life to the life of a Confederate soldier in the Civil War whose life was saved one day by another soldier who decided to look for wounded soldiers after a battle.

Did that chaplain know how many lives would be changed when he took that next faithful step?

Did William Moffatt Grier know how many lives would be changed because of his courageous effort to live through a difficult season in his life, and then follow God's call wherever it might lead him?

⁶ Thomas G. Long, *Preaching from Memory to Hope*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

No, no...none of us know how God will work when we take the next faithful step.

So perhaps the best way to celebrate Easter this year is NOT just by looking forward to next year when we will, God willing, all be together.

Perhaps the most faithful way to celebrate THIS Easter,
is to wake up tomorrow morning,
acknowledge any fears that you have,
and say to yourself:

**I will not live
in a smaller world
than the one God has given me.**

After all, the world that you will step into tomorrow,
that world is NOT ruled by fear or a virus.

It's a world ruled by God's sovereign Love.
A world in which Christ is risen, alive,
and at work in your life.

Alleluia!

Amen.