



The New England Church Pulpit

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QUANTUM EASTER: IN FEAR AND JOY

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Matthew 28.1-10

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone in front of the tomb and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him, the guards shook and fainted like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come; see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell the others to meet me in Galilee."

Easter has always been a puzzlement to me as, year after year, we come to celebrate the hope of new life while we're still mired up to our knees in the old one. Like those at the tomb, we know something of living in the extremes of fear and joy, what with ISIS threatening mass murder, planes plunging into the side of mountains at the whim of a suicidal pilot, a critical water shortage in California and legalized discrimination that takes us backwards fifty years to the days before civil rights. Even so, I am amazed that most of us get up every morning to start all over again in the hope of finding new life amid the tragedies of the old.

Fear even dominates this narrative of the resurrection: the earth trembles in a mind-bending earthquake; the ostensibly fearless, hulky guards are so afraid they faint; the women are frightened out of their curlers by the angel, and then just as they attempt a quick getaway from the tomb, they are greeted by the ghost of their dead friend Jesus. It isn't the tulips and lilies image we have of Easter. But the phrase that captures my attention as I read it is this: with fear and joy they ran to tell the others. With fear and joy. Scared out of their wits, and afraid that what they saw is too good to be true, they nevertheless leave with fear and joy to tell others on the outside chance that it was true. We know something of fear; we know something of joy; but it is the "and" that we don't always grasp. Fear AND joy. It is this description of experience that intrigues me, especially in the context of our current understanding of the way our world functions in quantum theory.

We have for hundreds of years assumed that the universe operates like a machine made up of many parts, as Isaac Newton described it. Accordingly, conventional wisdom has come to believe that if we fix the broken parts, the machine will run smoothly. Faith often mirrors our understanding of the world. In a religious context, then, we ask God to fix what's broken so we can enjoy life as a well-oiled machine. If we get rid of disease, life will be perfect. If we get rid of war, life will be peaceful.

It reminds me of a birthday card I received a few years ago that said on the outside: science has finally found the secret to longevity. And on the inside it said: keep breathing. We think if we can just find a way to keep breathing, life can trick death out of its power and all will be well. We try to make sense of the mystery of resurrection because we think it will be the answer to death and pain. We accept without questioning that joy will be known only in the absence of fear. But even in their non-scientific world, the gospel writers knew that it didn't work that way. Life AND death, peace AND chaos, joy AND fear are the realities of life for.

Quantum science gives us a different lens through which to see the world as more than a machine of cause and effect, of either/or but rather as an intricate system of both/and, a system of relationships that breathe and responds in tandem. We learn from quantum science that there is a necessary paradox that is wildly chaotic AND paradoxically orderly that maintains life's rhythm. The new physics explains that there is no objective reality out there waiting to reveal its secrets. There are no recipes or formulas; no checklists or expert advice to describe "reality." Everything is always new and different and unique. We cannot eradicate fear in order to live with joy as if they were separate entities of a machine that will operate this way. Notice in this story that is burdened with fear that Jesus doesn't take away their fear nor does he replace it with joy. In fact, he scares the bejesus out of them when he greets them before he invites them to be unafraid. It is the experienced power of fear **and** joy that send them on their way, excited about something new, if mysterious and unknown.

The universe, quantum theorists tell us, is one vast system of relationships that network and play off one another; a universe filled with both fear and joy that work side by side to continue to create an ever-evolving universe. The destruction caused by chaos, fear, and the dark night of the soul, says quantum physics, is necessary for the creation of something new. Easter cannot happen without Good Friday. Nor does Easter resurrection eradicate Good Friday's death. Death and life are part and parcel of the same entity we call existence. Fear and joy are what come of living. The disciples at the tomb are excited about something new taking place that comes from the very center of their fear when the old is shattered.

This has profound effect for people of faith, I think, for we realize that the way the universe works has more to do with relationship than control. We are more co-creators with God than the objects of God's good will or miraculous rescue. We are co-redeemers with God offering salvation from the power of fear to control by creating the joy of this divine order. We may want answers and solutions and miracles; what we are given is courage and faith and joy during the storm. We may want to be free of chaos and fear; what we are given is a world where chaos and order, fear and joy, death and life are partners in the ongoing evolution of our world. Here is Easter and Good Friday working in tandem in fear and joy.

A quantum understanding of the universe tells us that a system can descend into chaos and unpredictability, yet within that state of chaos the system is held within the boundaries that are well-ordered and predictable. Without the partnering of these two great forces, no change or progress is possible. Chaos is necessary to new creative ordering. This is the world into which Good Friday and Easter come year after year, day after day. Our divine dance partner, Margaret Wheatley says, insists that we put ourselves in motion; that we learn to live with instability, chaos, change and surprise for this is where the music of the universe is being played. We can stand immobilized on the sideline in

an attempt to protect ourselves from life's insistent gales, or we can learn to dance the dance of life with the creator and sustainer of this paradox of fear and joy in order to carry the world forward. The event of Jesus's death and resurrection is an archetype for each person's journey in life, comments Richard Rohr (from his daily blog). The intricate relationship and the balance between death and life, fear and joy is the stuff of quantum science and resurrection faith.

(Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science; Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*)

Easy Eddie was a lawyer in the early days of 20th century Chicago. He was the infamous attorney who kept Al Capone, Chicago's unelected boss, out of jail for a long time by deftly maneuvering the loopholes of the legal system to protect organized crime. Capone, notorious for enmeshing the windy city in everything from bootlegged booze and prostitution to murder, escaped conviction for many years because of the savvy but dark mind of Easy Eddie. For his efforts, Easy Eddie was well paid, not only in cash but with such perks as a mansion with live-in help that filled an entire city block in Chicago. Eddie lived the high life of the mob, giving little consideration to the atrocities that went on around him. But the one soft spot that kept creeping to the top of his conscience was his son, whom he loved dearly and on whom he spared no expense to give him everything he wanted. Ironically, Eddie even tried to teach his son the difference between right and wrong, even though he realized his lifestyle made that lesson impossible. He wanted his son to be a better man than he was, and yet, for all his wealth, there were two things he couldn't give his son: a name he could be proud of and a good example.

One day, Eddie came to his senses. Confronted with his conflict between being a good father and keeping his job, Easy Eddie decided to come clean and tell the authorities the truth about Capone in an attempt to offer his son some semblance of integrity. Knowing that it would cost him dearly, he nonetheless testified against the mob, and within a year, Easy Eddie's life ended in a blaze of gunfire on a lonely Chicago street. And though that year felt like an eternal Good Friday of fear and trembling, he knew something of the accompanying joy that he had given his son the chance for a new life though he himself would never live to see it. In fear and joy.

Fear and joy also permeated the life of a World War II Lieutenant Commander who served as a fighter pilot in the South Pacific. One day, Butch, as he was called by his buddies, was sent with his entire squadron on a mission, but after being airborne a few minutes, he realized that someone had forgotten to fill his fuel tank. His gauge indicated that he didn't have enough fuel to complete the mission, so his flight leader ordered him back to the carrier. As he reluctantly dropped out of formation and headed back to the fleet, he saw something that turned his blood cold. A squadron of enemy aircraft was speeding directly to his fleet, and with all of the fighter planes gone on the mission, the ships were all but defenseless. Without time to recall his squadron or warn the fleet of the approaching danger, he realized his only chance at saving his comrades was to divert the enemy planes. Laying aside all thoughts of personal safety, he dove into the enemy formation, surprising them with his wing-mounted guns that hit one then another of the planes. When his ammunition was finally gone, Butch continued the assault by clipping the wings and tails of as many enemy planes as possible to render them unable to fly. And indeed, the enemy squadron soon took off in another direction. For his heroism on that 22nd of February, 1942, he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, the first Naval Aviator to be so decorated. In fear and joy. He unfortunately lost his life a short time later in aerial combat at the age of 29. But today, Butch O'Hare's name graces the airport in his home town of Chicago as a tribute to his courage. You can see his statue and his Medal of Honor between Terminals 1 & 2 at O'Hare International Airport.

But that's not even the end of the story, for Butch O'Hare was Easy Eddie's son.

Good AND bad. Life AND death. Dark night of the soul AND the hope of morning sunrise. We live in a quantum universe where Good Friday AND Easter Sunday daily open up old tombs to new life, compelling us to live...in fear and in joy. Amen.

--Gary L. McCann

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