

Paschal Mystery series, also available through bit.ly/pmystery A Easter B Easter C Easter	Paschal Mystery 1: After Death... New Life John 20.1-18 by Tim Isbell	Preached on 4/16/06 (Easter) at New Life. Monterey Living Hope, 6/5/11.
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Thesis: Central to Christian faith is the Paschal Mystery: a process of transformation where we, after undergoing some kind of death, receive new life and new spirit.

The primary concepts in this sermon series come from The Holy Longing, by Ronald Rolheiser.

Intro

Recently I visited Dr. Doug Hardy (professor at Nazarene Theological Seminary). Asked what he's reading and using as texts in classes. One was *The Holy Longing* by Ronald Rolheiser, a Catholic priest. So I read it and from the experience I developed this Paschal Mystery sermon series.

Dr. Rolheiser is currently (6/2011) the President of Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, TX.

The message title uses a term from Rolheiser: Paschal. This has nothing to do with the 17th century mathematician Blaise Pascal, nor with the programming language Pascal. This is Paschal, meaning "of the Passover" or "of Easter."

In Christian spirituality, Christ is central. And central to Christ is his death and rising to new life so as to provide for us a new spirit. Central to all of this is the Paschal Mystery of suffering, death, leading to transformation and a new life.

Most Christians only partially understand it.

Paschal Mystery will take 2 messages. The 1st today and the 2nd on Pentecost.

Let's look at two texts for today:

David and his baby's death (2 Sam 12.13-25)

Tell enough of the story of David's adultery with Bathsheba, including Nathan's confrontation of David. Include David's confession and God's response: "You won't die yourself, but your child will."

The son of adultery gets sick. David begs God to save the child. David fasts and lies all night on bare ground. The nation's leaders plead with David to get up and eat. But he

refuses and 7 days later the baby boy dies. His advisors are afraid to tell David the baby is dead, but David sees them whispering and guesses. The advisors confirm his suspicion..

David gets up from ground, washes, applies lotions, changes clothes, goes to the Tabernacle and worships God, returns to palace and eats, goes in to Bathsheba (now his wife) and comforts her.

The advisors say to David, "You've got it backwards. You mourned before the baby died, then afterwards you get up as if nothing happened!" David responds "when the child was alive I hoped the Lord would change his mind and let him live. But when the boy died I realized that this was not to be. So it is time to move forward with life."

Through the death of his baby, David experienced a process of transformation in which God gave David new life and a new spirit for what lie ahead.

Mary Magdalene at the resurrection (Jn 20.1-18)

Mary experienced death of her hopes & dreams. Jesus, the one she followed, the one she expected to become king and free Israel from Rome, was killed on a cross.

Here is the resurrected Jesus and Mary doesn't recognize him. He's somehow different. The night before, Mary's hopes had died, but the next day she sees the resurrected Jesus and new dream is born.

Through the death Jesus, Mary (and all the disciples) experienced a process of transformation in which God gave her/them new life, and later a new spirit for the life that lie ahead.

Clarify some definitions

Paschal mystery

...is the mystery of how we, after undergoing some kind of death, receive new life and new spirit.

If we are ever to come to fuller life and spirit we must constantly be letting go of the present life and spirit.

Difference between Terminal death and Paschal death

Terminal death ends life and ends possibilities.

Paschal death is just as real, but it ends one kind of life and opens a person up to receive a deeper, richer form of life.

John 12:23-24 (NLT) Jesus replied, "The time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. The truth is, a kernel of wheat must be planted in the soil. Unless it dies it will be alone—a single seed. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives.

Today's sermon is about a Paschal death, not a Terminal death.

Difference between a Resuscitated life and a Resurrected life.

Resuscitated life is when we are restored to our former life and health (like Lazarus, the brother of Mary/Martha). He lived a while longer in his resuscitated body and then endured death again.

Resurrected life is when one dies to the present life and receives a new life, different from the past life, a richer life.

The Paschal Mystery is about a Paschal death about a resurrected life.

After Jesus' resurrection, both Jesus and his followers received a new life; at Pentecost his followers receive the spirit to live this new life.

The Paschal Mystery is a process of transformation within which we are given both new life AND a new spirit to go with it!

Paschal Mystery tends to follow 5 stages

1. Good Friday: we experience real death; what was life is gone forever.
2. Easter Sunday: the reception of New Life.
3. 40 Days: a time to grieve the old and readjust to the new.
4. Ascension: a time to let go of the old life and let the old bless us.
5. Pentecost: we receive a new spirit for the new life we are now living.

Some examples

The death of our youth

Imagine that you wake up tomorrow morning and realize it's your 70th birthday; you are no longer young. All the cosmetics, exercise, plastic surgery and positive attitude cannot change that. Your youth is dead.

But you are not dead. You look in the mirror and see a vibrant person, despite the physical limitations. You are alive as a 70-year-old, not as a 30-year-old.

Your Good Friday has occurred; your youth has died. Resurrection, too, has happened: you have received the life of a 70-year-old.

You have a choice: you can refuse to grieve and let go of your lost youth and, like Mary on Easter, try to cling to what you once knew. But then you will be an unhappy, fearful, and frustrated 70-year-old.

Or you can let your youth ascend. If you will say, "It was good to be 20, good to be 30; but now it's good to be 70," then new life comes.

Some of the happiest people in the whole world are 70; and some of the unhappiest people in the world are 70.

The difference is not in who has kept himself or herself the slimmest or most youthful looking, but who has received the new life of a 70-year-old.

The death of our wholeness

The world has many people who were badly hurt, abused, or unfairly treated earlier in life. Many become angry and bitter.

They know something died in their life, they know it is unfair, and they are right.

They want their life back. They want justice. They want the one who hurt them to pay for their hurt. And they are right.

But they are miserable, and they will stay miserable until they embrace the Paschal Mystery.

Some of the happiest people in the world have been abused, and some of the unhappiest people have been abused.

The difference is not in the trauma of the abuse or the quality of the subsequent therapy, but in experiencing the Paschal Mystery.

The death of our dreams

Rolheiser writes of a 47-year-old man, 45 pounds overweight and all around the middle, from a small town in northern Canada.

His dream started as kid, listening to hockey on the radio, hearing the announcer call, "He shoots, he scores!" That was this kid's dream – to be a star hockey player.

He was pretty good. At 19 he was playing tier-one, junior hockey, the best hockey short of the NHL. He was a star. In a couple years he got a chance in the NHL; but at age 22 they took him aside and told him he was too small and not gifted enough. And they let him go.

He went home, started working for Safeway, married a good woman, and had 4 good kids.

It's now 25 years later and he's still at Safeway, but he's restless and depressed and can't help thinking about what might have been, or what almost was.

One week he was worshipping in church and his daughter happened to be reading the lection scripture. He paid more attention than usual because of his daughter. She read about Jesus ascending to heaven. He realized that he needed to let his daydream ascend something like that. Hockey was a good dream, but long over.

It took 25 years, but he was finally ready for its ascension.

Some of the happiest people in the world work in small jobs in small towns in northern Canada, and so do some of the most restless and unhappy.

Happiness is not determined by who makes it to the big time and who ends up in small jobs. It depend on receiving the new life God has for us.

The death of our honeymoons.

Imagine a man and woman meet, fall in love, marry. The honeymoon of their relationship is right out of Romeo and Juliet.

15 years go by. Each gain 15 pounds. They look at each other across the breakfast table

and both sense that the honeymoon is over.

But their relationship is not dead, in fact, they are bonded more strongly than ever. They are living the life of a couple married for 15 years, not 15 days.

They can cling to what they once had – accuse each other for the loss of the passion, give in to temptation look for passion with another person, or lose themselves in their work or a hobby.

Or they can grieve and let go of the honeymoon period and receive the new life and the new spirit God is offering them as a 15-year married couple.

Some of the happiest couples in the world have been married 15 years, and some of the unhappiest.

Happiness in an ongoing relationship depends on undergoing the Paschal Mystery. People who have been married 15 years are designed to receive the new life of people married 15 years. And the Spirit God offers to make the 16th year better than the honeymoon year.

Have you had some deaths?

Easter teaches us that there is a Paschal Mystery at play in the very center of Christian faith.

Some of us are thinking about how we've processed the deaths in our past.

Before today maybe we didn't have a theological framework to understand this mystery, but today we recognize that we've experienced it. As we listened to this message, we felt affirmed.

We don't have to understand good theology to live it. God's Spirit leads us into new life whether or not we understand the theory. If you have experienced the Paschal Mystery: good for you. Now you have a framework to understand how your processing flows naturally from your Christian faith. And you are prepared for the next time around. And God will put someone in your life who needs to hear about this Paschal Mystery.

And some of us are thinking about a death we still cling to, one that is dragging us down, maybe making us angry or depressed or worse.

It's time to discover the Paschal Mystery. If you are a Christian you know all the pieces, you just have to apply them to your life.

If you aren't a Christian, isn't it time for you to become an apprentice of Jesus? His life models this Paschal Mystery. Follow him and his Spirit will teach the Paschal Mystery to you. He will lead you to:

1. Name your deaths.
2. Claim your new births.
3. Grieve what you've lost and adjust to the new reality.
4. Release the old, let it ascend AND let it bless you in the process.
5. And he will offer you his Spirit, the spirit of New Life, for the life you are now living.

The Paschal Mystery is the secret to a fulfilling life. Ultimately our happiness depends upon undergoing it. It is the central mystery of Christian faith. And the Spirit of Jesus offers it to everyone of his followers.

Other resources:
Click on the link for the Google Slides for this sermon. (Similar to PowerPoint)
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