The other day my wonderful wife and I were discussing whether or not God is able to bring good from evil. I won’t go into all the nuances of the conversation, but we concluded that as Christians we believe that it is possible for good to come from evil and much of the reason for why we believe that to be possible is because of today, which if you were not aware is Easter Sunday. The narrative of Holy Week began on Palm Sunday with enthusiastic crowds welcoming Jesus as he rides into Jerusalem. On Maundy Thursday there is the Last Supper and Judas’ betrayal of Jesus. With Good Friday comes the crucifixion and then today, when all that seems left is to mourn the death of Jesus, something unexpected happens. This week was like falling down a staircase, as triumph gave way to ever worsening tragedy, but today the angel announces, “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.” And so back to my original question: Why is God’s victory over sin and death an example of goodness coming from evil? Here is why. When humanity did its worst, taking the Son of God and nailing him to a cross. Evil appeared to have won the day and then suddenly, it lost its power. Today God changes the narrative, God changes the arc of the story. Jesus is raised from the dead. Life comes out of death. And this is why we have to say yes, good can come from evil. The goodness of today does not lessen what was done. It does not in any way say that it was a good thing to crucify the Son of God, but rather it acknowledges that God is greater than the worst thing that we can conjure -- death. Just as God created the earth and all that is in it out of nothing, God can survey the wasteland of evil and still bring about good.

Think about it like this. We are technically in the season of Spring, even though Wisconsin can be a little slow to catch on. And one of the hallmarks of Spring is the idea of rebirth. We look out across desolate fields, at bare trees, at dead grass and we begin to see signs of life. We see the green shoots of bulbs making their way up from the earth. We see the beginnings of blooms on tress and we see a stray blade of green grass in the midst of a brown lawn. Over the next few weeks and months, these shoots will explode into a cacophony of colors and we will forget that there was even a time where the earth looked so bleak. What once appeared dead now appears as very much alive. The temporary death of winter was just that, temporary. And it is just that spirit of rebirth that is exemplified on Easter Day.

I think too often we can miss the fullness of the message of Easter by failing to understand that Jesus’ resurrection was like the first green shoot of Spring. It is not an isolated incident, but rather an announcement that rebirth has come for all. Through Christ’s resurrection we can all be resurrected. He went first so that we may follow behind. When we announce that Christ is risen, this is not just something we say and it is not just an expression concerning the reality of one person; it is an announcement of the reality available for all of humanity.

And by saying Christ is risen we are not simply making a statement to reassure ourselves that death is not the end, but we are rather talking about a new beginning. The start of a new life for those who believe in Jesus. There is resurrection for Jesus but there is also resurrection for us. We cannot look at the resurrection in the same way we look at life insurance – something really only necessary once. Rather this rebirth that is apparent in the Resurrection is available to us right here and right now. I started out today by talking about the idea of God bringing good out of evil. This does not mean that God creates the evil, but rather that God has the power to bring good, no matter the circumstances. Meaning that in this life, when we survey the barren fields where nothing seems to live, we are to look for those green shoots, knowing that God can even be there. We can look where good is sprouting up where nothing seemed possible before. And further, if we are to participate in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are also called to be those green shoots. To be the place of hope and healing where there appears to be nothing. The Resurrection is not a passive event. It is not something we look at and say that was nice, now let me get back to my life. It is rather the beginning of the new life for all of us. Not when we die, but rather today.

The great fourth century Bishop and Theologian Gregory of Nyssa believed that growing into God was not something that you did once, but was rather something you did across eternity. That is, we start growing into God here, but it never ends, even after we die. I think this can be a helpful way to conceive of eternity because it provides a link between this life and the next. For I think too often heaven is conceived of something completely detached from this life. Our good behavior here is something akin to greasing the palm of the Maître d' to ensure that our table is not next to the bathroom. But this is not the case. The resurrection of Jesus starts now and continues across eternity. Which means that the question becomes, are we living like Jesus has been raised from the dead? Are we bringing the hope and joy of today with us wherever we go?

I would love to say that I do this on a regular basis, but often I feel I am better at continuing the status quo. I can often find that I am more comfortable with the world as it is and am almost fearful of what living a resurrected life would be like. I hold onto my sinful nature because it is mine after all and I am very comfortable and familiar with it. But look at the first thing that the angel says to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, it is the phrase, “Do not be afraid.” Now there had just been an earthquake and angels tend to frighten people in Biblical accounts, so the angel’s message about not being afraid could refer to those two realities, but I also think it also covers the future. Do not be afraid about what this means going forward. Do not be afraid that the world has changed, that God’s power has burst through and brought life out of death. And to live lives that bring life to others. We are not to hold on to the pettiness and discord which sees this life as a zero-sum game but rather are to aid God in bringing life out of death. This is not just about us making things outside of ourselves better, but is also about finding the dead places in our lives and asking for Christ to bring life out of death there as well. Whatever it may be, that is not glorifying to God, can also be caught up and transformed in the Resurrection.

Today is not just a commemoration of something that happened a while ago that will only be relevant to us when we pass from this mortal life. Rather it matters today. It tells us that when we look at the brokenness and discord in the world and in ourselves that Christ is capable of being there as well. Christ can live where there appears to be no life. Today when the angel says that Jesus has been raised, he is inviting us all to be raised; to reach and to grow into what was done through the power of God almost two thousand years ago so that we may be Christ’s own this day and forevermore.