



“One Hope”

The Vigil of Easter
7:00 p.m. Saturday, March 26, 2016
The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Romans 6:3-11; John 20:1-18

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

They showed up late on a Saturday afternoon, at camp Nawakwa. The two of them were dirty, as though they had been living outside for some time. Personal hygiene was obviously not one of their top priorities. They were visibly under-nourished, and not forthcoming as to where, if anywhere, **home** might have been.

Camp director (and my spouse) Marianne knew that the shelter she normally would have taken these two to would not be accepting guests at that time, so she chose to give them food and shelter for the weekend. Then, first thing Monday, she gave them a ride to the shelter. She was concerned for their well-being, but didn't give them too much more thought, once she had made certain they would be looked after and receive the help they needed.

A few days later, they showed up again. Marianne had received family contact information, so this time she called their family directly, who very shortly arrived and retrieved these wayward two.

When that couple showed up, for the fourth time in three weeks, at 3 AM, on a Friday, Marianne gave them shelter, and called the agency in the morning. “You’ve got to do something,” she said to the agent. “We’d like to help, at least with the fellow” (the agent knew we have two sons) “but they have family.”

“Let me work on this,” the agent assured her.

A few days later, she received a phone call: “He’s here at the shelter. If you want him, come on and get him.” And that is how Norbert, the black Labrador, came to live with us.

We were not looking to expand our household. We already had a dog: Cyril. He was a Large Dog. And, we had multiple cats as well as well. We didn’t need another critter, let alone an undernourished, groundhog killing, young, relatively large, dog. Norbert was **not** what we were expecting in our lives, at the beginning of that summer. But God knew better.

That first Easter morning, Mary thought she knew what to expect there at the cemetery. She went there, expecting to mourn. She went there, expecting to find the cold,

decomposing, corpse of her teacher, her friend, and her Lord. She went expecting to find the rock in place, and to . . . what? Sit and weep? Rail against the stone? Cry out to the sky, *why* was her Lord dead? We don't know, because she did not encounter what she expected to encounter. Instead of death, she found . . . a stone that had been moved.

When she returned with Peter & John, she found couple of guys, in blazing white. And she didn't understand, She didn't *comprehend*, the significance of the event, because she was too busy trying to get what she was **seeing** to fit in with what she was **expecting**.

Everything she knew, everything she had *experienced*, told her to *expect* a corpse. When she sees, not a corpse, but two men dressed in nearly blindingly white outfits, she cannot grasp what has happened. So for the *second* time, (having said this first to Peter & John) she says "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

It is not until she says this the *third* time, to, as it turns out, *Jesus* himself, does the veil of her own reality tear itself apart, and only *then* can she see the day for what it truly is. Not until **Christ** calls her name does this **One Hope** break into her overburdened heart. Only when she **stops** looking for what she *expects* to see, and allows Christ to show her what is *actually* there, does that Hope fill her, surround her, and bring her to new life.

We were not looking for a new pet. We didn't have any openings. We *had* a house full of pets, and boys, and spouses, and *stuff*. Yet **Norbert** knew, more than **we** did, that we would need him. Norbert willingly and eagerly befriended 13 year old Cyril, and accepted Cyril on Cyril's own, slow, and aged, terms. When, a year later, Cyril came to the end of his gracious, fun, life, did we understand the true reason for Norbert's presence - he was there to bring **us** to the one hope of new life. Norbert was there to remind us that, in the midst of our grief and suffering, God is present.

God is present. Sometimes in the form of blinding white angels; And God is present sometime in the form of an enthusiastic black Labrador.

In the midst of our sorrow over the death of our Christ, Mary comes to bring us the message of life, the message of Christ's love, the message of the New Hope: Christ is Alive! We are Forgiven! Alleluia!

Amen.

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