

NO REASON TO FEAR

[written in oral form]

You may ask yourself..... What is that beautiful house?
And, you may ask yourself..... Where does that highway go?
And, you may ask yourself..... Am I right..... am I wrong?
And, you may tell yourself.... My God, what have I done?

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That is the last verse to the 1981 song “Once in a life time” by the band Talking Heads.  
The end of the song is the repetition of the phrase.... “Same as it ever was, .....same as it ever was.....same as it ever was.

That line drives home the message: Nothing changes / it’s the same old pattern we all get trapped in to. Including those with power always prevail / there is nothing we can do; it is all hopeless..... The poor will be poor, and the rich get richer..... “Same as it ever ways...same as it ever was..... YET,.....the droning of that plea, in the song, is interrupted near the very end with a quieter voice that states:  
“Then a Twister comes..... Here comes the twister!”

*[Those of you who know the song, may never have heard those two lines. Go home and listen to the song again.]*

Then a Twister comes..... Here comes the twister!

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What does a twister do?
It turns *everything upside down and inside out*, and now the title of the song has some meaning –
“**Once in a life time.**

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Every now and then, there is a hiccup in the universe, and life as we know it..... is never the same again.

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Nevertheless, 2,000 years ago, the crucifixion of Jesus seemed to confirm that nothing really ever changes. ...*same as it ever was.*

Jesus was a man who sincerely **lived and proclaimed** God’s way of justice, peace, love and grace. He went around helping people, and that includes advocating on behalf of the powerless and exploited. His small, but growing group of followers radiated a real optimism. They had hope in his message that love would prevail, and that God was trustworthy. Fear seemed to lesson.

Yet, Jesus was calling for change, real change.
Jesus was advancing a new order / a new way. He wouldn’t play the game and go along with norm / the status quo.
He was speaking out on sensitive and political issues, and he was brash enough to confront Jerusalem.
*He was a threat to the Jewish authorities, and they couldn’t risk waiting to see if he was just a flash in the pan or if he would fail.

Remember that aspect: **they couldn't wait!** They feared the worst; they expected the worst for themselves, so they chose violence to get their way. They were afraid, and sought to destroy their perceived problem. They assumed that killing him would end the message.

Problems must be solved, and Killing the leader, usually takes care of things,,,,,, for only a little while, until new and more leaders fill the void in the unsolved problem.

The Jewish leaders represented a system with a depraved reality based on deficit living.

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Jesus was killed and buried as a criminal.

In those days, a typical corpse was properly prepared and visited by grieving loved ones, for a couple of days, before it was buried.

In contrast, the remains of criminals were quickly put in the ground, and with the Sabbath approaching, this was especially true for Jesus.

The Upside down kingdom was dead in a tomb--*same as it ever was.*

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Prophets and social reformers tend to die too young.

James Douglass, in his book "JFK and the Unspeakable: why he died and why it matters", suggests that John Kennedy was becoming a peace advocate, and that is why he was killed. He was bringing change to the old order, and that couldn't be tolerated..... *same as it ever was.*

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It is prudent to go along / to stay the course / to not rattle anyone. Killing Jesus was intended to reinforce that understanding – **that fear!** Fear can make people numb and submissive.

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Even so, with a touch of defiance, early in the morning of the day after the Sabbath, Sunday, a couple of caring women headed toward the tomb of Jesus to appropriately anoint the body. As they were walking to the tomb, they were wondering how they were going to move the large stone that was covering the tomb.

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*Before we proceed with this event, please note that chapter 16 of Mark ends with verse eight. There are translations that include additional verses; however, those verses were added later, and .... they are confusing and they detract from the real message with the such things as handling poisonous snakes and so on, ... So ignore those extra verses if they are in your translation.*

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Also, this likely is not your first exposure to Easter. You know how the story turns out, but the two Marys heading to the tomb did NOT know. And, when they came to the tomb, they saw that the huge stone had been rolled away, and they were very surprised by that.

Even so, they *slowly* entered the tomb..... expecting silence and a corpse inside.

Instead, there was a young man dressed in white sitting on the right side.

You have to love Mark. He has these little details, such as the Grass was very green, and in this case, the mystery man is sitting on the right, not on the left..... as if we really care.

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I imagine that this was an Alfred Hitchcock moment / a Stephen King moment – a terror moment. People in tombs are not supposed to be sitting up and talking.

The man in white tries to comfort and calm them down. He tells them to NOT be afraid – not to be alarmed..... everything is okay.

He confirms that they are in the right tomb, by correctly identifying Jesus, and then..... before he gives them important instructions, he informs them of the impossible: Jesus has been raised from the dead!

\*The Twister has come.

Here is the Twister that will rearrange reality:

Jesus was resurrected!            God resurrected Jesus.

God decided NO.... *to same as it ever was.*

The universe had a hiccup.

God, intervened and declared.... YES to Jesus – Yes to everything about Jesus, his life and his message.

The darkness did Not prevail.

The old, heavy status quo was turned upside down.

The first ended up last / the last first!

God said YES.... to Jesus.    ~~~~~

God didn't play a trump card.    .... NO.... God changed the rules!

The way and message of Jesus is God's way, and God's way will prevail!

Peace, justice, love and grace **IS** the life of Jesus that will NOT end.

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Now, Listen to the message that the women were given:

“Go tell Jesus’ disciples and Peter that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”

Did you catch that: “...and Peter” as if to say *especially Peter*.

The new way / God's way is full of Grace.

Peter publically denied Jesus, three times. Obviously, Peter was fraught with regret and shame,..... and for Peter, *Jesus wanted to make sure he gets the message*. To Peter, Jesus in essence said, “It’s okay. I forgive you and want to see you along with everyone else.”

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Tell Peter..... tell everyone who has failed in life. Tell everyone with regrets and shame.....

“There is grace!”    “There is grace!”

The Easter message begins with Forgiveness, grace and hope.

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And, there is surprise, too!

Did the two women skip out of the tomb singing songs of praise?
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NO! They ran / they fled out of the tomb in terror and utter shock, and they didn't say a word to anyone because they were full of fear.....
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Throughout Mark's account, we observe the disciples acting foolishly.... or NOT getting it. This is a creative device Mark uses to get the reader to say to self, "I get it. I would respond better; I would do it right. I wouldn't be full of fear, instead I would tell everyone that God raised Jesus from the dead."  
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Do we get it?Or... are we being silent? ??????
Fear can do strange things to a person.
Fear can force a person to run and hide, to be silent..... or to react with violence.
The Jewish leaders were afraid and chose violence.
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Following September 11, 2001, 90% of Americans approved of President Bush's choice of war / to do violence to go after the enemy.  
Bush even rationalized he's decision by stating, "...the Enemy / the terrorists were getting stronger, and America could not afford to wait.  
He stressed that they must attack the enemy before it was too late.  
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In his message was the confession that America--the American way and values would get weaker in time, and that the enemy would prevail, unless destroyed soon.
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The schema of deprivation is very common, and it is often used by political leaders to assert their will. It is the fear that evil / all that is bad is stronger than goodness and justice.  
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There was a study done, a few years ago, that asked people how they would feel if stranded on a island, with different sorts of people.
The subjects felt okay if 95% of the people were good like they were, and if only 5% were bad people, such as criminals.
When the level of assumed bad people reached 10%, most thought the future of the good people living on the hypothetical island would be in doubt. All concluded that if the ratio was 50/50, the good people were doomed.

Conventional wisdom believes evil is stronger than good,... and maybe that is why good, righteous people will turn to do the evil of violence in order to try to end a threat--believing evil ways are stronger and will prevail.
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When people accepted what they were told about Saddam Hussein's WMD they were more afraid, than gullible.

Likewise, when we are told we must use violence to stop ISIS, most Canadians conclude, "But of course", even if we have to break the law to attack them in Syria.  
Similarly, even though we know terrorism is a state of mind, we are willing to surrender rights and freedoms because we fear the phantom terrorists.....fearing that they will grow stronger and will prevail.

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We-- who claim to be followers of Christ,
??Do we not believe that good and righteousness prevails... that the true way wins in the end?
Do we believe that Jesus was right?

Or is evil stronger? Will the terrorists get stronger over time?
Can we not model justice, peace and grace..... and win their hearts and minds over to **that** way of being
/ God's life giving way?

Or is that just foolish, idealistic thinking?
??????????

If evil and greed are stronger, then we better hoard what we have. We better NOT share and help others.
We must be strong in their ways in order to fight off the enemy. WE need to build up our military. We
dare not proclaim peace and grace because it is a farce..... and..... Jesus died and his message was
killed, too.

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BUT, the whirlwind happened, and God was in whirlwind.  
The universe was turned upside down.... or I should say right side up!

And finally, Isaiah's message in chapter 25 comes alive.  
We do not have to live in scarcity and fear.  
There is **bounty** / **fulfilment** in following God / trusting God's way.  
As Isaiah "figuratively" presented:  
With God... life can be a feast full of rich food and fine wine.  
The darkness will end, as will fear and death.

God will wipe away the tears – there is GRACE.  
Grace to all with regrets and shame.

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And, verse 9 notes: "We have waited for God.... and God came through – God saved us."

The bad guys didn't get stronger over time.
We didn't have to kill them to be saved.
Maybe it never was an issue of good guy, bad guy.
Perhaps, the problem is the fear.
Maybe, **all along**, it was an issue of trusting God's way of justice, peace, love and grace? ?????

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Lingering in the empty tomb is the message: Go back to Galilee to understand what has happened. Go  
back to Galilee to discover the risen Christ.

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Galilee is where it all began in Mark's book. Jesus came from Galilee.
The message from the empty tomb is: If you are afraid / If you don't understand and if you need to
see the risen Christ, then Go back to the beginning / reread the story..... OR better..... BE the
story.

The Easter message is a message of hope and grace, but it is also an invitation to experience the risen Christ..... by following the way of Jesus--God's way.

Easter calls us to go out onto the byways to comfort those who are tormented, to bring the hope of healing to those who are suffering, and to help take away the fear.

Easter calls us to nurture disciples, to feed the hungry, to give to the poor, to stand up for the weak and powerless, and to boldly confront unjust leaders and unjust laws.

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The Power of the resurrection is like a mighty whirlwind / a twister that turns everything upside down..... including what is within us!

Here comes the twister....., and it is Not "Zap" all your fears and worries are taken away.

Warriors think that way. They think they can quickly end a problem--how silly / how foolishly idealistic!

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The Mark text tells all who are afraid: Go to the beginning. Start again, and learn what it means to follow the resurrected Christ.

God is with us. We can do this.....together.

Thanks be to God.

Jesus lives. There is grace and hope.