

Thirty years ago, before seminary, I was a high school science teacher in Lockney, TX, about an hour in that (NNE) direction.

One of the things the students loved was when I would get out my electric guitar and play and sing what were then contemporary rock songs at various school assemblies and talent shows.

After doing this for a number of years, one day I was approached by 3 of my sophomore students. All 3 of them were good science students, but were each a little bit shy and, to be fair, a little nerdy. One of them said, "Mr. Haney, can we ask you a question?"

I said, "Sure Tony. What is it?"

He said rather nervously, "You probably don't know this, but I play keyboards. Orlando plays the bass. And Ryan plays drums. Do you think there's any way we might be able to play with you the next time you sing at a school show?"

I think that they were expecting me to say no, like I was some big rock star that would have no interest playing with them.

So they seemed a little surprised when I said, "Of course! That'd be awesome."

There was a show coming up in about 6 weeks. And so we picked out a couple of songs and practiced them in my chemistry lab after school. We worked up "Winds of Change" by the Scorpions and "Civil War" by Guns N' Roses. And the guys came up with a band name: The Ballistic Arachnids. Ballistic referring to the guns in Guns N' Roses. Arachnids referring to scientific class for spiders and Scorpions. (I told you these guys were a little nerdy.)

Well the big night came. It was about 5 minutes before we were supposed to go on. And my 3 young bandmates started freaking out with a severe case of stage fright. "Mr. Haney, we've got to call this off. We can't go out there. There's no way. Besides, the whole school is out there." And it basically was. About 180 students, plus the teachers, plus hundreds of parents, siblings and grandparents. It was a crowd of about 500 folks.

But I told them, "Guys, we've practiced. You sound great, this'll be awesome. Besides, we're all wearing sunglasses for a reason. If you're nervous out there, just close your eyes and play."

We went out. And these guys had 180 classmates cheering and applauding for them. We started playing and the response was loud and enthusiastic.

I don't know how rock stars do it. I can't imagine what it must be like playing in front of 5,000 people or 50,000 people without letting it go to your head. Because playing in front of 500 cheering people is a huge adrenaline rush.

We started with our acoustic number, "Winds of Change." Then we cranked up the volume and the distortion and rocked out with "Civil War."

The guys played great. And at the end we got a standing ovation. We left the stage and the thunderous applause and cheers continued. One of the guys excitedly said "Mr. Haney, we've got to go back out there and do an encore."

I said, "Guys, we practiced two songs. We just played two songs. We're out of material."

But that change in attitude marked an amazing alteration. In only 10 minutes time, three nervous frightened high school students had been transformed. They were now confident junior rock stars, at least that night in Lockney, TX.

On Easter Sunday every year we celebrate the most amazing occurrence in the history of the world: the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That is a stunning transformation of earth-shaking importance.

But there are other transformations on Easter Day. Sure, the Resurrection of Jesus is the primary, central transformation. But there are also secondary transformations. These transformations, these alterations occur in Jesus' followers in response to Jesus rising from death. And they change these disciples in profound and permanent ways.

So I want to spend a few moments on these secondary, derivative transformations that occur in the disciples in response to Jesus' Resurrection.

A few moments ago we heard the beginning of John's account of the Resurrection. Those of you who are regulars at St. Paul's know that we've been reading through the Gospel of John as a congregation this Lent.

We've been talking about the themes in John. We've been talking about the repeated theme that Jesus is light and life. Thus it's no accident that our Easter Gospel reading begins with these words:

"Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb..."¹

Early... While it was still dark...

In John, those words mean two things.

1. It means that it was early in the morning and still dark outside.

But it also means something deeper:

¹ John 20:1

2. It means that Mary Magdalene, and for that matter, all the other disciples are also in a state of spiritual darkness. They are clueless as to what is going to happen to Jesus that Easter Day. Thus, they need to be enlightened.

So Mary gets to the tomb and its empty. And in her spiritual blindness she can only think one dark thought: grave robbery.

She runs and gets two of the disciples, Peter, and the Beloved Disciple whom is traditionally viewed as John.

Peter and John run full tilt to the tomb. The younger John is faster and gets there first. But he stops at the door of the tomb. The ever-impetuous Peter goes past him right on into the tomb. Then John follows Peter into the tomb.

And there in that twilight state a little light begins to dawn. Peter is not enlightened. But when John sees the empty linen wrappings, a lightbulb goes on. The arrangement of the linens does not indicate grave robbery. Instead it suggests something else to him.

We're not exactly sure what it was about the linens that made the light come on for John. But we're told that the head covering was especially noteworthy to him. It was rolled up separately from the larger sheet that covered the body. It might have suggested to John that Jesus' body dissolved leaving the head wrappings behind. Or it might have suggested that Jesus got up and removed the head wrapping and rolled it up separately in a ball. But whatever it was, we're told that John "saw and believed." Something other than grave robbery had happened here. At that moment the light of the Resurrection dawns for John.

Mary takes a little while longer. Peter and John leave. And Jesus appears to Mary. She doesn't recognize him. And she is still caught in the dark scenario of grave robbery. But Jesus calls her by name. "Miriam. Mary."

And Mary recognizes that voice and she answers, "Rabbouni! Great teacher!" The Good Shepherd calls one of his sheep by name and she recognizes his voice. At that moment the light of the Resurrection dawns for Mary Magdalene.

Later that evening, Jesus appears to the rest of the disciples. We'll read that reading next week. Even though the sun has been up all day, these disciples have spent all of that first Easter Sunday in spiritual darkness.

And they are hiding out behind locked doors in isolation and in fear. They worry that arrest and trial and death may await them outside these doors. And anything the others may have said does not change their state. The sun goes down and they're still in spiritual darkness and in fearfulness.

And Jesus appears among them. And he says, "Peace be with you." And at that moment, even though it's evening, the light of the Resurrection dawns for these disciples. In John's words, "They rejoiced when they saw the Lord."²

Thomas wasn't with them. He'll still be in spiritual darkness for another whole week. But then Jesus appears to him, and for Thomas the light of the Resurrection dawns on the 8th day of Easter.

This is the culmination of a wonderful pattern in John. When it comes to believing in Jesus, one size never fits all.

John follows Jesus for 2 years. He stands at the foot of the cross. But he doesn't fully get it until he looks inside the empty tomb on Easter morning.³

Mary takes a bit longer. She doesn't fully get it until Jesus calls her by name.

The other disciples take half a day longer. It's not until the sun goes down that the spiritual light dawns for them.

Thomas takes a week longer still. And yet he is able to make the most complete profession of faith in John's Gospel, calling him, "My Lord and my God!"⁴

That's a wide spectrum of responses. There are a variety of people with a variety of timetables. And yet they all eventually respond in faith to Jesus. They all experience transformation.

They all move from spiritual darkness to living in the light of the Resurrection. They will no longer be afraid of anything. Even death itself will no longer trouble them.

The same disciples who are hiding out in fear that first Easter will be out in the streets 7 weeks later proclaiming publicly that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

Eventually they will go willingly to their own deaths because they refuse to stop sharing the Good News that Jesus is alive, that Jesus has conquered death for all who believe in him. That's an incredible transformation.

30 years ago, in Lockney, Texas, 10 minutes on stage performing in front of a cheering crowd transformed my students. They had been scared out of their wits beforehand. Afterwards, they were ready to go out on stage again and play some more, even when they had nothing to play.

1,987 years ago in Jerusalem, Jesus' followers experienced even greater transformation. They had been scared out of their wits. They had been hunkered down in fear.

² John 20:20

³ John 20:8

⁴ John 20:28

But after their experiences on Easter day, death would no longer frighten them. They went out first to Jerusalem, and then to the surrounding area, and eventually through the entire Roman Empire, and then the whole world.

And unlike my students, they did have something to sing about. They did have something to proclaim:

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. And he offers the gift of eternal life to all who follow him.

Our world is in a dark place right now. But we don't have to live in spiritual darkness, or spiritual paralysis. We don't have to live in fear.

Because Jesus Christ is risen. And he promises to all those who believe in him that he will raise them up. Even though we may die, Jesus will still raise us up.

The light and life of Jesus Christ has conquered death itself.

May that light shine in the spiritually dark places in your life.

May the light of the Resurrection dawn upon you.