

Go to Galilee
Pastor Todd Smith Lippert
Matthew 28: 1-10
Easter 2018

I've been re-reading *The Fellowship of the Ring* by J.R.R. Tolkien, enjoying again this story of hobbits, elves, dwarves, and human beings coming together to rid the world of evil by destroying a ring of terrible power. There's a scene in the beginning of the book that left me with an Easter feeling.

The hobbits are fleeing the Nazgul, evil creatures on horseback chasing this ring that they are carrying, and they are forced to go into the old forest. They are afraid of the old forest, but they know they have no choice but to face those fears.

While in the old forest, the Hobbits get lost, and as they are wandering, they get sleepy. They stop by an old willow tree and two of the four hobbits lean against this great big trunk and fall asleep, and another bathes his feet in a nearby stream, and the fourth, Sam, as he is just about asleep, realizes that they are all under a spell. The old willow tree is singing them to sleep.

By his own will, Sam wakes himself and goes to his friend Frodo who has a tree root wrapped around him, holding him down under water. Safely rescued, Frodo with Sam check on the other two hobbits (Merry and Pippin) only to realize that they have been swallowed up by the trunk of the old tree.

Frodo and Sam try starting a fire and chopping at the tree but that doesn't do any good. Desperate, Frodo then runs up and down the path crying, "help, help, help!!"

Then he stops. He hears an answer. A song.

*Hey dol! Merry dol! Ring a dong dillo!
Ring a dong! Hop along! Fal lal the willow!
Tom Bom, jolly Tom, Tom Bombadillo!*

Poor old Willow-man, you tuck your roots away!

*Tom's in a hurry now. Evening will follow day.
Tom's going home again water-lilies bringing.
Hey! Come derry dol! Can you hear me singing?*

This strange, human like character appears, Tom Bombadillo. He sings a song into trunk of the willow tree and the hobbits are freed. Then Tom Bombadillo invites the hobbits to his house for supper and rest, and he sings nonsense songs and laughs and dances all the way home.

Bombadillo lives with the River-woman's daughter, Goldberry. As the hobbits ask Goldberry, "who is Tom Bombadillo?" Goldberry responds simply, "he is." As they look at her questioningly, she says, "he is Master of wood, water, and hill." As the hobbits stay in the house, their fears and their weariness leave them.

Soon the hobbits are ready to go on their way and Tom Bombadillo gives them a song to sing if they ever get in danger.

The hobbits are sent on their way, with the assurance that Tom Bombadillo goes with them. They do need him soon, they end up in another tomb-like trap, and they call on Bombadillo for rescue, and he, mysteriously, comes bounding and singing and dancing along.

I had an Easter feeling while meeting Tom Bombadillo again: joy, happiness, relief. It wasn't lost on me that Bombadillo laughs, dances, and sings in the face of danger and death. Nothing evil can defeat him. Love, warmth, and a playful happiness flow out of him. I felt different. I think Easter faith should feel something like this.

I've been imagining the angel in today's story, singing a Bombadillo like song:
*Poor old Caesar man, You put your cross away!
I'm in a hurry now, love will show the way...
Can you hear me singing!*

The stone is rolled away and the angel playfully sits on it. No attention is paid to the Roman soldiers shaking in their fear. It's like the angel is just playing around with the most

powerful forces known to us: the invincible forces of the Roman empire that crucified Jesus, the failure of relationship that betrays Jesus because of greed and fear, and life and death itself. The angel belongs to God, who is, who is love that is greater than all that brings death. There's a lightness, a sense of relief, and joy that is the bubbly source of our story.

The resurrection stories become useful for me when I free them from the past. When my question shifts from, "did resurrection happen?" to "where do I see resurrection happening?" Then I get somewhere. When I let go and sink into the message of the story that Love really is what is most powerful, and so there is always hope for healing, and renewal, and life from death, then I feel joy, hope, relief, and I start to see new life finding its way out of dead end, tomb-like traps, and my fear and weariness starts to fade.

The angel in our story may be playful, but the angel certainly has a purpose. The angel's purpose is to send the women to the twelve and to send them all to Galilee. "Go quickly and tell the disciples," the angel says, "Jesus has been raised from the dead and is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him. That is my message."

The women run from the tomb with joy and wonder and meet Jesus on the road. Jesus can say anything and Jesus says, "Go to Galilee. There you will see me."

The gospel writer is very focused telling the church of the first century and the church of the 21st century to go to Galilee, there we will see the Risen Christ. Before you spend a lot of money on tickets, let's talk about what this means. For the gospel of Matthew, Galilee means "Galilee of the Gentiles." The big question in the early church is "what do we do with the Gentiles, with people who aren't Jewish?" Galilee is the place where culture is colliding, where dietary practices and beliefs are in conflict. Galilee is where the enemy is, Roman soldiers, the other. The gospel of Matthew is saying go to the divisions, go to the conflict, go to your enemies, adjust as you need to and invite people into this self-giving way of life that leads to wholeness.

Then watch for the miracles that love will bring into being even there. You will see that Christ is alive.

Each of the gospels says that resurrection faith is not rooted in evidence but in an experience of love's power in the face of all that deals death. Luke and Matthew especially then send the church places where they will keep seeing the Risen Christ, and Matthew sends the church to Galilee: go to division, go to the enemy. Watch for love doing amazing things and there you will see that Christ is alive.

My escape TV lately has been the Netflix series *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee*. In each episode, Jerry Seinfeld picks up a different comedian in a different classic car and they get coffee and tell their stories of how they go about the art and life of being a comic. In one episode, he picks up Trevor Noah, the new host of the Daily Show. Trevor Noah has an amazing story. *He grew up in South Africa, born during Apartheid to a white father and a black mother.*

As he is riding with Jerry Seinfeld, he tells stories of Apartheid, of how his parents had to live and lie to keep him safe as a child from an illegal relationship. His whole life is lived at this conflicted intersection, this boundary.

Noah says, "The first time I realize how powerful comedy can be is when we were in Johannesburg for a parade/demonstration. There were policemen on horses and everyone was afraid of policemen on horses because they would beat you. As we're walking through the crowd, my grandfather is walking with me and the policeman says, "hey get out of the way." Trevor Noah's grandfather, instead of staying quiet as a black man, speaks up, calls out to the guard, gets his attention, and tells a joke. The joke isn't appropriate enough for me to repeat here. You can find it on your own. The guard drops his baton and laughs.

Noah says, "I'd never ever before in my life seen a black man and a white man laughing together." That moment sends Noah into a life of not only making people laugh, but in his comedy he relentlessly points out how absurd race is, how absurd this construction is that keeps us apart. He uses laughter as a way to bring down the walls that divide us and to create openings for human connection. During this episode, I had an Easter feeling: joy, hope, relief, because I saw love, doing something, in Galilee.

Trevor Noah's story has nothing to do with the church, that I know of, but I think he lives in Galilee, and he tells stories from Galilee: of human connection even there, by telling the truth about all that is absurd and keeps us apart, and doing so in a way that makes people on all sides of the divide laugh and think, and reflect, and find a point of connection. This comedy reminds me that love is more powerful than I think.

Easter is a place of refuge. Maybe it is like Tom Bombadillo's house. We are reminded of love's power in the face of even death, we are reminded of the bubbling, warm, loving, playful source of our faith that delivers us from the tomb. But we will soon be sent, with assurance and rest, but we will be sent: to Galilee; into tension and difference, towards enemies, wherever that may be for us. We are to see what miracles love can do even there, and recognize the Risen Christ on the way.

And then we come back here, to worship, to little Easters all along the journey. We remember again how powerful love is, and we remember the song, and the Easter feeling, and we are sent to Galilee once more. May we go with trust and hope. Amen.