

Happy shoeless Easter!

Last week I sat with a young man whose paranoia had cut him off from almost all social contact. I spent half the time listening to him and the other half looking for a magic wand. I guess you can't find what doesn't exist.

Looking at this experience through the Easter lens, I wanted to get straight to Easter Sunday; let the egg crack and watch the new life emerge; roll the stone from the tomb; Alleluia, he is risen!

And yet the gratitude this young man expressed for the time I shared with him recalled me back to another place; one of drawing near, of foot-washing and trial, and solidarity and presence.

Easter in both its pagan and Christian forms speaks loudly of new life. Whether it's the fruitfulness and fertility of spring in the northern hemisphere, or our last hurrah before winter hibernation, Easter is a new-life story. But new life, unlike novelty, is hard-won. A friend of mine recently had her first child. She spent nearly four months lying down to prevent a dangerously premature birth. New-life is hard won. Easter Sundays are built on Good Fridays.

Yesterday I overheard one of my son's friends asking my wife, "What's good about Good Friday?" As I listened carefully to hear what my wife would say (always on the look-out for a good quote and relieved that I'd been spared!), I remembered a scene from the film version of *Angela's Ashes*. It's been years since I've seen this movie, but one scene remains with me. A school teacher responds to classroom of boys taunting one who has no shoes; whose family is poor and dysfunctional. The teacher points to a crucifix hanging in the classroom and says, "Our Lord has no shoes. He died shoeless. You don't see our Lord hanging on the cross sportin' shoes. You don't see our Lord hanging on the cross sportin' shoes, now do you boys?" And in chorus the boys reply, "No sir, not sportin' shoes".

In the prison this Friday we will offer five services, each one meditating on significant moments in Jesus' journey to the cross: betrayal by a friend, a sham trial; carrying a burden; a stranger who steps in and shares that burden for a way, torture, execution, dying. And throughout it all not a magic wand to be found, and probably not even a decent pair of shoes.

I am often recalled to the power of presence, the power of drawing near, of coming alongside by those who are suffering; who experience themselves as cut-off, betrayed, rejected. In a world that is to so many people a hostile place, Good Friday says that the cosmos, the universe, the supreme authority, God, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, draws near, comes alongside, and suffers with us, not sportin' shoes.



Wishing you a happy shoe-less Easter!
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