

Preacher, Mike Banister

Easter, April 16, 2006

Thank God for Shoestrings

Reinhold Niebuhr said that we should learn to take our myths not literally but with complete seriousness. By myth he didn't mean a falsehood or a narrative of lies. By myth he meant a story that resonates in the soul – with meanings that cast light on our existence.

He died, was buried and on the third day arose.

Stated baldly the elements of the story can seem unremarkable – almost, but not quite. I mean dead men do not rise. But these raw facts of this narrative have a provocative power, a power to evoke a cascade of images and metaphors in the mind, at least in the mind of an odd bird like myself.

What are some of these other resurrection images?

Seeds buried in soil, pushing through, blooming as plants, showering the world with color.

Cocoons open and release butterflies.

A phoenix arises from ashes.

Winter becomes spring.

Hope is born out of despair.

Being emerges from nothingness.

Well, you get the idea. Images of new being can nourish the soul.

I suspect we all have our own resurrection stories: our own fragmentary contributions to the meta-narrative of Easter. You think of yours while I tell you mine – my Easter story.

I suspect the theme of most Easter stories will likely be spiritual life emerging from spiritual death. For me two bouts of clinical depression were occasions of rebirth for me. After weeks, no months actually, of struggling through a grey, thickening fog of mental oppression the mind spirals down to a point of black despair and all hope departs. Food loses its taste. Sleep won't come. Time passes like molasses pouring from a jar. Scott Fitzgerald got it right when he wrote, "It is always 3:00 a.m. in the dark night of the soul."

I lost thirteen pounds in two weeks. I'm surprised no one is marketing the new, revolutionary "Doom and Gloom" diet, drop those unwanted pounds quickly.

Finally you find yourself sitting across from an intake interviewer for the Presbyterian Psychiatric Unit, and he is asking questions about the specifics of your suicidal plans. If you pass his test, they take away your shoestrings. The strategy works. There are no recorded instances of suicide by shoestring asphyxiation at Presbyterian.

They lead you to your tomb – I mean room. You bury your head in the pillow and know beyond doubt that this is IT. The bottom. Dead man walking.

And damned you are depressed.

So far the treatment isn't working. Of course you've only been here a couple of hours.

Then the days pass. The prozac begins to bathe those neurons in serotonin. On the psych floor you're exposed all day long to the "kindness of strangers", therapists and fellow sufferers.

One day you go out with your group for exercise hour and for the first time in months you FEEL the breeze and the warmth of sunshine and you actually SEE the gloriously green on the trees. The world has color again. You realize that you are feeling – could it be? – pleasure...Peace... happiness?

Time begins to flow.

And then it happens.

They give you back your shoestrings.

I LOVE SHOESTRINGS!

Soon I walk out of the hospital – alive again.

"Elaine, take me to Burger King."

After days of a diet of pressed turkey, unseasoned vegetables and other delights –

I want a whopper done MY WAY!

Glorious Whopper!

Veritable essence of Prime rib!

Thank God for whoppers and shoestrings and time that flows and the grandeur of the ordinary sacred.

That's my Easter story. You have one. Think on it.

Easter is a great day for affirming life.

May the peace that surpasses even the peace of prozac be yours.

Amen.