

“Death Has Moved to LC211”

Isaiah 53:4-9; John 20:1-18

Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

April 21, 2019 (Easter)

Linsly-Chittenden is a venerable academic building centrally located on the Yale University Campus. “LC” is the building’s shorthand, and it is in Room 102 that popular philosophy professor Shelly Kagan taught a course succinctly titled: “Death”. The course content that Professor Kagan offered became the material for his book by the same title: “Death”.

Students were surprised, entering LC102 one day, to find the following instruction on the blackboard: “Death Has Moved to LC211”! Only a pompous Ivy League institution would be sufficiently presumptuous to move Death around for the sake of convenience!

Death has moved, tragically, to mosques in New Zealand, and Pennsylvania.

Death has moved, tragically, to sanctuaries in South Carolina and Texas.

Death has moved, tragically, to public schools in Colorado, Connecticut, and Florida.

Death has moved, tragically, to Christian villages in Pakistan and India.

Death has moved, tragically, to refugee camps in Syria, Asia, and Central America.

Death has moved, tragically, to the streets of Chicago and Washington, DC.

Death has moved, tragically, to Fordham University and Penn State University.

Death has moved, tragically, to villages of the Great Plains, the Midwest. and the South.

Death has moved, sadly, to my family, and to yours.

In an Easter letter to a congregation, this pastor once listed some of the self-imposed ills afflicting humankind, noting that the world as my grandchildren find it may not have changed much from the imperfect world that I knew when I was their age: corporate greed, militarism, homophobia, discrimination, xenophobia, pollution, etc.. In response, I received a critique from a parishioner who said that he would have preferred a more upbeat Easter message—something focusing more on colored eggs, candy, spring flowers. Yet I admit that I felt somewhat vindicated at the time by John Buchanan, then publisher and editor of the Christian Century magazine. While I was disappointing a parishioner with my analysis of our imperfect existence, Buchanan talked about a friend of his who had lost all hope for the human race: *“The news each day is so consistently and relentlessly depressing, the friend said, that he is certain that the human project had run its course. We might flail about for a few more centuries, but the end of civilization was in sight.”*

Death has moved to LC211.

How DO we get from the downer of death to an exhilarating Easter? How DO we get from the Friday of a crucified Jesus, to the Sunday of a risen Christ?!

Surely Mary Magdalene was the first among us to seek answers. Imagine: anxious and angry...confused and conflicted...distraught and disillusioned...frantic and frightened...weeping and wondering...personally horrified in the midst of public havoc: “They convicted my best friend!” “They mocked my Master!” “They beat my beloved!” “They crucified my teacher!” “Now, they have stolen his body!” “WHERE HAVE THEY TAKEN MY JESUS!” “WHAT HAVE THEY DONE WITH MY JESUS!”

Death has moved...from the Cross...to the empty tomb. And that is the key: the EMPTY tomb!

“Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?”

“Tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”

“Mary!”

“Rabboni!”

“I am ascending to my God, and to your God...Go and tell the others.”

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples:

“I have seen the Lord!”

There are signs, even today.

For nearly 10 years, James Robertson walked 21 miles each day to and from his job in Detroit, because his car stopped working, and bus service was cut back. Thanks to a news story about him, and the public’s subsequent response, initiated by a college student, Robertson became the beneficiary of a new car, and an apartment nearer to his job at an auto parts factory.

Death IS moving...from the Cross...to the empty tomb. And that is the key: the EMPTY tomb!

For 25 years, Dave Guio had served admirably in the human resources department of his employer, but he had been passed over three times for promotions for which he was eminently qualified. A consultant privately confirmed what Dave had suspected, that his sexual orientation was the reason, even though Dave had never discussed it with anyone at the office. But Dave and his partner of 16 years live in Indiana, one of 29 states that permits employment discrimination based upon sexual orientation. Now, under public pressure, Indiana state leadership is reviewing such laws.

Death IS moving...from the Cross...to the empty tomb. And that is the key: the EMPTY tomb!

There was, of course, more to Editor John Buchanan’s Easter message than just the description of his friend’s defeatist attitude regarding “the human project”. Formerly the Senior

Pastor at Fourth Presbyterian Church on the Magic Mile in Chicago, Buchanan's editorial is entitled, appropriately enough, "Reason for hope", and here is his conclusion:

"Although bullies, thugs, and murderers seem to be winning, peace and justice will prevail at the end of the day...We become fools for Christ because Jesus was still loving and forgiving even as men were driving nails through his wrists and ankles...We dare to believe that the resurrection drama points to God's ultimate authority and power. Death did not defeat Jesus. The power of empire, human hatred, cruelty, and bigotry did not prevail on that dark Friday because three days later, there was Easter."

And my Easter letter to that other congregation ended more hopefully as well:

"What sustains me now is what sustained me then: The reassurance of faith in a higher power—in a God of patience, forgiveness, and compassion...in God's once-and-for-all intervention: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Death may have moved to LC211...but it is no match for the lesson of an EMPTY TOMB!

If not for a building on an Ivy League campus, imagine for what else "LC" might serve as an abbreviation:

Think about it! That's right! "Living Christ!"

Death has moved to Living Christ!

Go...and tell the others!

