

Everyone loves a good underdog story.

Whether it's watching your favourite hockey team struggle back from a 1-4 position only to win in overtime, or it's your team around the table fighting back from certain loss in an evening of cards. All it takes is a little bit of skill and a little bit of chance and a little bit of fumbling on the other team's part, and you're in the running once again. And people love stories of those whose lives were all but over because of the decisions they made, of the paths they chose or were forced down, but something miraculous opened their eyes, something turned them around, and now they're running their own business, they're giving back to their community, they're reconnected with their family. We cheer in our hearts that they did it, they made it.

I think underdog stories give us hope.

We see them and learn that as long as it's not over, all is not lost. Whether we're struggling and need someone to tell us that there's still a way out of our conundrum, or even if we're fine, the fear that we may one day be the struggling one, to know that others have made it back, others have claimed the gold even after all seemed lost, we know we can maybe do the same thing.

I think this is a part of the reason why Christ's death was so brutal on His followers. Certainly there was grief and sorrow from what they witnessed days ago, and I can only imagine they were maybe a little traumatized from what happened to their beloved Jesus, and scared out of their mind from what could happen to them next.

But they didn't just lose a good friend and a wise teacher. They lost hope on the night Jesus died. Each moment that passed robbed them a little more of the hope they had built up over the last three years. As He was arrested, then dragged from this authority to that council, then beaten and humiliated, then nailed to a cross and hoisted before the world to see. Each moment showed that His situation was a little more desperate than the last, and each successive reality made a comeback that much more difficult and unlikely. Jesus would have to work a more wonderful miracle as His situation

went from dismal to dire to impossibly dreadful. And after it seemed like Jesus couldn't even help Himself, God in heaven would have to do more and more to save Jesus as the hours went by. But hope wasn't lost until He took His last breath and they proved He was dead by piercing His side, water and blood pouring forth.

As they carried away His body and laid it in the tomb they weren't just grieving the loss of a friend; they were grieving the loss of all they had committed to since they heard His message and followed Him through His ministry; they mourned the loss of eternal hope for today and for eternity that they had learned to trust in; they were processing the loss of a future they had only begun to cling to.

On Good Friday all was over. There was no comeback, no last minute plays. The underdog was defeated. All was lost. And there's no possibility of a rematch.

When God took on our flesh and was incarnate of the Virgin Mary He made precisely this situation possible. Before Jesus' birth God could not be vulnerable; nothing could be done to harm Him. He was not mortal nor imperishable; nothing could destroy Him. But when Christmas came around and God was swaddled and nursed and comforted by His mother, He became just like her, just like us.

He felt the trials of living in a sin-corrupted world, knowing hunger and pain and exhaustion. Certainly they affected Him differently than you and I because He knew how to faithfully respond to such brokenness, going to His Father for rest, relying on the Word of God for sustenance, and certainly trusting in God through whatever agony He endured rather than the complaining I am so quick to do; but being 100% God united with 100% man, He was susceptible to the brokenness of creation.

So it would have been really impressive if this lone man, a teacher and not a fighter, if He has taken arms, grabbing a stick and fighting off the soldiers and the crowds and proving His strength, proving that He should be king. That would have been impressive but not impossible. He would have garnered followers for sure, but He'd just be in a line of the next strongest and wisest of rulers. Even tearing His hands and feet off the cross and putting His torturers in their place, that would've been an

underdog story for the ages; the world would line up to worship that man, even if he had been given godly strength to help him.

But Jesus didn't wait until the last second to prove just how strong He was, that He can come back from His last breath and still take control. He let mankind, He let sin, He let the devil, He let death have it's full way with Him, doing it's absolute worst, letting it all win even. The immortal God became mortal in Christ and didn't flee from it; the everlasting God became perishable in Christ and just allowed it to happen.

And then three days later, while the grief was still washing over Mary, while the processing process was still very incomplete for Peter and John and all of Jesus' followers, news begins breaking that Jesus isn't where they left Him. Naturally they don't jump to the conclusion of a resurrection, but we see in their responses that they still love Him; Mary, to Jesus whom she thinks is the gardener, still calls Him her Lord.

In the midst of their confusion, their concern, Jesus shows up. To one degree or another, to each person He meets, Jesus must reveal Himself, He must make Himself known. No one goes looking for a risen Christ, no one expects to see their Rabbi standing in front of them. Hope has to be presented to them anew because it had been completely robbed from their hands and their hearts.

So Jesus meets Mary Magdalene face to face and calls her by name, knowing her, comforting her, revealing that all is not lost but in fact everything is gained.

Even after His flesh perished, even after mortality had the last word, Christ simply rested and rose victorious. He proved that He doesn't simply have the power to prevent the suffering and death of those He encountered; He's not only able to heal the centurion's servant from a distance and with only a word; He doesn't just have enough power for a bleeding woman to touch Him and find sweet relief; He doesn't just have the strength and faith to protect others from Satan's turmoil, casting demons out of those possessed for decades; He's not only able to reverse the death of His friend Lazarus, or of poor

Jairus' daughter. He is able to win over sin, the devil, and even death once they have been declared victorious over Him. Not even His own death can hold Him down.

The Lord of life has proven Himself, vindicating Job's hope that he and his God will see eye to eye even after the worms have consumed his flesh. Likewise Paul promises that even though the Corinthians, and you and I, are mortal and perishable, an absolutely undeniable fact, there will come a time when we will be clothed with imperishability and immortality. We will be completely changed.

Today, this is what your Lord meets you to say, to promise you, to reveal to you. The Word made flesh that it could die comes to you in this moment to assure you that death will not be your end; the source of all life died so that He might rise and assure you that you too will rise. He meets us all as He met Mary, in our Job-like despair over the futility and despair over the chaos and brokenness of the world.

For Easter is for the Job's, for those who recognize the loss they've suffered and the loss that will continue, for those whose bodies hurt and spirits are battered and bruised, for those who haven't accomplished all they hoped for in life, for those who realize a comeback is pretty unlikely at this point. Easter is for you, for all of you, who if you're honest with yourself, are pretty hopeless in yourselves, and on too many days are hopeless in God because even though He's your Lord, like Mary, Jesus can seem pretty absent or neglectful or even dead.

He is risen and He is here, though. And He is revealing Himself, calling you by name today. In His Word, beneath His supper of victory over death, as you recall your baptism, He is here with His gifts, giving Himself, giving life, to you.

And it comes not as a miracle enacted on you, as though you are some Lazarus, given another lease on life, another couple of decades to keep on living. No, Jesus does all this by uniting you to Himself, so that the immortality and imperishability that He proved as He met His disciples once again, those eternal traits would become yours just as you are His.

In order to rise with Christ, we must die with Him as well. In fact we daily die with Him. We die to our sin, acknowledging it as too great to handle on our own and deserving of death. We die to ourselves and the control we wish to have on our life, what our days will look like and what we will accomplish. We die to the world, seeking to serve it rather than be served by it, and knowing it will hurt us anyways. We endure the losses and trials and pains of this life, and we suffer what Satan can throw our way and the temptations that continue to persist, and we cling to Christ's promises even though they seem anything but true. And one day we will die in death as well, but in that moment we will know for certain that every day we have died to all of this and then risen in Christ to live and serve has not been in vain, but we will see Him with our own eyes and know for certain the promise that He has defeated death and that we will rise in a perfect body to life everlasting.

And until that decisive, glorious moment, this is Easter. Christ revealing Himself to you, the Lord of Life alive again after being completely dead, proving nothing has power over Him, and Him calling your name that you would believe that all He has done and all He is is for you.

Jesus is risen and so shall you.

Christ is risen.