

The Circle of Life

On Easter, we explored what Jesus' resurrection means for us on the practical level of daily life.

1. Warm up question: What was the highlight of your Easter weekend?
2. Have someone slowly read John 20:1-18. While it's being read, listen closely, and consider the questions below. (Read the questions in advance.)
 - a. What detail of this story most captures your imagination – and why?
 - b. Which character in this story most fascinates you – and why?
 - c. The other Gospels indicate that other women accompanied Mary to the tomb. If you had been there with Mary, how do you think you would have reacted? What do you think you would have felt?
3. The death and resurrection of Jesus has many possible deep meanings. On Sunday, we explored one of them. In John 12:23, Jesus tells his disciples that “the hour has come for me to be glorified,” then adds, “Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.” To help us understand Jesus words, Jeff told a parable about a seed that dies. He told about an acorn who enjoys the good life growing high on an oak tree during the long summer. But when fall comes, the acorn gets separated from its source of life, tumbles to the ground, and is crushed into the moist soil by a passing animal. Buried, its life seems over. But then the “dead” seed sprouts, springs back to life, and goes on to become far more than an acorn. It becomes a mighty oak that gives birth to many more acorns, which, in turn, birth many more trees, etc.
 - a. What lesson about himself, and his own mission, do you think Jesus was trying to teach us through the parable of the seed that dies?
 - b. What lesson about our own lives do you think we're meant to learn from Jesus' parable of a seed that dies?
4. Jeff suggested that Jesus' parable of the seed that dies reminds us of a fundamental pattern God has built into the DNA of creation itself – the cycle of seasons, birth and death. Some call it “creative destruction” – the idea that all things must die to make room for even better things to happen. To us, death seems cruel. But from another perspective, death is a gift from a loving God to keep us from getting stuck.
 - a. Most of us want to freeze life in place anytime things are going well. Parents wish their little kids could stay young, workers don't want to change careers when all is going well, students don't want to graduate and leave their friends, and we never want to let a love one pass from earth to heaven. What is something that

you wish you could freeze in place right now, so that it would never change? If God gave you that wish, do you think you'd ever live to regret it?

- b. Jeff told about how he didn't want his family to move from Indiana to Colorado when he was in high school. But looking back, he sees how much his life was enriched by that "great loss." The Franciscans whose grapes shriveled learned the same thing. Can you think of a time when God used a "great loss" to force you to move to an even better place in life?
 - c. Do you see losses in your life as opportunities, i.e., as deaths meant to lead to resurrection? Is there a place in life right now where you should apply that lesson?
5. In Luke 24:5, the angels ask the women at the tomb a question that seems to be a mild rebuke. The question is: "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"
- a. What do you think that question meant?
 - b. When in your life have you been stuck "seeking life in dead places," i.e., looking back and trying to re-create what had once been, instead of looking forward and embracing what is next?
 - c. Hebrews 13:14 says, "We have here no continuing city." What do you think we're supposed to learn from those words?

6. Read the lyrics to "The Circle of Life" and tell us what phrase most speaks to you:

From the day we arrive on the planet
And blinking, step into the sun
There's more to see than can ever be seen
More to do than can ever be done
There's far too much to take in here
More to find than can ever be found
But the sun rolling high
Through the sapphire sky
Keeps great and small on the endless round.

It's the Circle of Life
And it moves us all
Through hope and despair
Through faith and love
Till we find our place
On the path unwinding
In the Circle
The Circle of Life.

7. Jeff told about a conversation years ago with a good friend about death. Ana-Mita said, "I'm glad I'll die someday; I wouldn't want to live here forever." Jeff thought she was nuts and said, "I'd jump at the chance to live this life forever."
- a. Which sentiment most appeals to you – and why?
 - b. What deceased loved one do you most wish your could bring back? If you could, would you?
 - c. Read I Corinthians 15:54-55. When your time comes to die, do you think you'll be able to greet death as a blessed passageway to something more wonderful? If you're not there yet, what more needs to happen that might help you get there?