

Will We Be Remembered?

Luke 24:1-11

Easter Sunday, April 16, 2017

Rev. Dr. John Suk

As many of you know, my brother died at the young age of 51, several years ago. He died of Lou Gehrig's Disease, also known as ALS. I and my sisters spent many months caring for all his daily needs, until he went into a hospice.

It was an intense time, also faith-wise. My brother hoped for a miracle. He invited faith healers into his home. He listened to his Bible all night long. He urged friends to pray for his healing, and they did, all across the country. When nothing took, he became upset. He was irritated by the fact that I did not believe he or anyone else could count on a miracles. He saw it as a lack of faith on my part.

But he also came to grips, I think, with his situation. And through it all, we grew very close. Then, near the very end of his life, he asked me to write a book about him.

I wondered at that. My brother was a generous man. He was a volunteer fireman. He was a volunteer triage worker in his local hospital. He did volunteer relief work overseas. He was not wealthy, but donated all he could—a small fortune, actually—to his church and to a home for single mothers.

But many people do these sort of things. So I wondered, what would I write? Art was an accomplished man. He ran huge engineering projects, building airport runways and terminals in Kelowna, where he lived, and all across Canada. He had more friends come in and out of that house in a week than I see in a year. He was chair of his church's council. He ran 15K every day, and pumped iron in the gym three times a week.

But you know, the world is full of volunteers, and full of people who do big business, and full of athletes. So I wondered, what in the world would I put in a book about my brother? I mean, he was a good man. But the world is full of good men and women. Was there actually a book worth writing, somewhere, there in his life?

So I asked my brother why he wanted me to write a book about his life. I think his answer was deeply revealing not only of him, but of something many of us hope for. Art said to me, "I want you to write a book because I want to be remembered."

The thing is, no one who runs 15K each day is long remembered for that. No one in this audience remembers who designed, or managed the build, of Pearson's Terminal One. No one is long remembered for going overseas to build a classroom, or for donating money to some cause dear to his or her heart. If we have children—which my brother did not—we might be

Luke 24:1-11

remembered for two or three generations by our grandchildren. But that is about it. I do genealogy for a hobby. I have found and registered thousands of ancestors going back to the eleventh century. But I *remember* six of them. And of those six, my kids remember only three. My grandchildren will remember none of them. The author of *Ecclesiastes*, in the Old Testament, wrote, "The people of long ago are not remembered nor will there be any remembrance of people yet to come by those who come after them."

True, but of course, there are exceptions: The Emperor Constantine, Napoleon, Sir John A. McDonald and Edward Blake.

Or perhaps you don't remember Edward Blake. He was an Ontario premier and official leader of the Liberal opposition in Ottawa who never managed to defeat Sir John A. No one ever wrote a book about him either. It takes a lot to be remembered. It is something only one in a million accomplishes.

Dying young, my brother wanted to beat the odds. If we're honest, I think a lot of us have struggled with, or at least wondered, "Will we be remembered? What kind of a difference do we have to make to be remembered?"

Meanwhile, a US naval carrier task force is steaming to North Korea, and the rhetoric of war is heating up. Can we stop it? United Airlines dragged a passenger off one of its planes this past week. Can we make United change its ways? The world is warming up and people living in the coastal regions of poor nations, as well as people living in near-desert regions of Africa, are under immediate threat. Can any of us cool things down? Lightly masked but ultimately racist political rhetoric on the far right seems to be all over the news. Can we make them shut up?

Not I. How did Shakespeare put it? "Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

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So when Mary came to the tomb a few days after Jesus' crucifixion, and later told the disciples that it was empty, the disciples, too, thought her story was nothing more than an idle tale, signifying nothing.

But here is the thing. It turned out that Jesus was more than just that one in a million. Much more. Whatever happened, exactly, in that tomb on Easter, Jesus' story grew and grew. His example became a divine exemplar. His teachings defined the goals for living a good life for billions. Today, even if we will be forgotten, we remember Jesus.

But the news is actually better than that. Much better. You see, Jesus is not merely remembered, but his story, the one we all know, has become our story. His hope that those

Luke 24:1-11

who truly followed his ideals might make a difference has found its answer in all of us, together. One carnation on our Easter cross is pretty; but all together they sing.

We all struggle with personal insignificance. My brother certainly did. I do, from time to time, when I have the courage to face up to the truth of my life. What I love about Easter, though, is that it joins me to a story that makes it better and better for all humanity, to a movement that cannot be stopped, to a future that can be accomplished, step by step, hand in hand.

And we—of whatever faith, or even no faith at all—we who embody that story together, including my brother, we will be remembered. Our lives together can make Shalom.