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Occasionally a fellow Christian asks me if I am saved, and if so, when I was saved. I like to reply, “When Jesus came out of that tomb!” When Jesus left it empty, denying the tomb an opportunity to fulfill its role, because of God’s great humor and victory over death.

A joke I like to tell involves a haughty seminary student, learning great and esoteric things, very impressed with himself. One day he wandered through the seminary garden thinking profoundly abstract thoughts about minutiae of theology and Biblical scholarship, proud of his abstruse theories above that of the average pew-sitter. He noticed a groundskeeper, an elderly uneducated man, reading Revelation on his lunch break. “Pffft”, the student thought, “That book is surely beyond his ken”. (Being so educated, he used the word ‘ken’). The student probed the man, “Do you know the meaning of that book?” The old man turned his head, smiling, “Yeah – Jesus wins!”

And that, too, is the meaning of Easter.

Easter is a day of great hope. Tremendous hope. All-encompassing heart-gladdening hope. A day of more hope than we, in our human incapacity to handle the infinite, can comprehend in its fullness. It is the hope that no matter how much we have mucked up our lives or others’ lives, or how extreme the suffering around or within us, Jesus has power over the tombs that would bring us to an early death. The tombs of emptiness, hopelessness, darkness, shame, guilt, suffering, feelings of being absent from God; whatever dark and fearful things are in your tomb. I imagine Jesus standing just outside of his tomb on Easter morning, and with a big grin, pointing at it and saying, “Ha ha! I win!” Then he jumps into our tombs – if we let him – exposing our darknesses to the redemption of his salvific light, washing away our guilt and shame with his life-giving waters. Easter tells us that while those dark times may hold dominion over us here and now, that reign is temporary. Our darknesses do not have to be. They are not the ultimate answer or end, because Jesus’ Easter love has overcome them. Our ultimate end is to be with God. God, who reaches out to us constantly, asking us to join in holy relationship, and who will “wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.” (Rev 21:4)

The great American hymn “Saints Bound for Heaven”, says:

Our bondage it shall end, by and by, by and by,
Our bondage it shall end, by and by;
From Egypt's yoke set free;
Hail the glorious jubilee,
And to Canaan we'll return, by and by, by and by,

And to Canaan we'll return, by and by.

Our salvation is here. We do not need to earn it. We cannot earn it. None of us can ever be faithful or perfect enough to earn it. It is God's free gift: an unending, unstoppable river of grace, born of God's love, that fills the dark places of our personal tombs and washes away the junk. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son... not to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:16-17). God's actions throughout history are all about love. The whole Passion narrative, the journey to the cross, is about God's love standing up to and defeating our darknesses. The Easter story is about one thing: God's love. God's love for each of us, regardless of race or religion, sexuality or economic status, what we have done or left undone. If God loves anyone, it's YOU! And that, my friends, is Good News.