

Emotional and Spiritual Rollercoasters

How many rollercoaster fans do we have? Which is your favorite?

I used to love to ride them, but I got hurt on Space Mountain at Disney World, and that was the end of the big rollercoasters for me. I may go on a Splash Mountain one or the simpler one at Disney, but that is the extent of it for me today. Remember when our big ride was the Wild Cat at Riverside or the rickety structure at Mountain Park? And then, they had introduced the loop at Riverside, and THAT was the “be all and end all” for rollercoasters in the area. Especially in our youth, how many of us would finish the ride and get right back into line to experience it again? How times have changed.

Today’s rollercoasters take us through various themes, adventures, dark places, and bright spaces. We reach unthinkable heights and unimaginable depths. There are twists and turns that lead to jarring things, as well as calm times that seemingly exist only to scare us with a big drop, sometimes into darkness. Any rollercoaster ride could be used to describe what the followers of Jesus may have experienced during that first Holy Week.

The first ascent could have been at the Transfiguration, when Peter, James, and John were with Jesus and the vision they witnessed. Other ascents could have been at the healing miracles Jesus made happen in the course of his ministry. The first jarring drop could have been at the beheading of John the Baptist, almost a foreshadow as to what was to come for Jesus. The last few ascents could be the raising of Lazarus from the dead and the triumphant entry into Jerusalem that we celebrated on Palm Sunday. However, with any rollercoaster, what goes up must come down.

The disciples were plunged into the depths, most likely to a level beyond their imagination. In just one night into the next day, everything they had never imagined in the approximately three years they spent with the Teacher happened. They barely made it past the arrest, let alone the “trial” before the Sanhedrin, the time with Pilate, the visit to Herod, and then back to Pilate. Then the beatings, the condemnation, the carrying of the wood, and the subsequent crucifixion. Most of the male followers hid as they assumed they would be next. Who hung on

tight to the bar and made it through? John, Mary Magdelene, Mary of Nazareth, and a few other women.

The women were there when they laid Jesus in the tomb. They were the ones who saw the guards heave a heavy stone over the entrance. They were running out of time anyway as the day was almost over and the Sabbath, or Shabbot, would begin. They would have to wait until Sunday morning and get someone to move the stone. Would the guards be there?

It was a mixture of ascent and descent when they got back to the tomb that Sunday. The guards were not there or asleep, depending on the account. However, the stone was also gone, so they knew they could clean and anoint the body. Then, they stooped into the tomb and discovered that the body was not there, but only the cloths they had wrapped Jesus in before they were moved by the guards. John's Gospel tells us that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdelene to have her tell the disciples. Imagine Mary's confusion but overjoyed surprise. This was the ultimate ascent out of the depths.

We will hear in the coming weeks how Jesus appeared to the disciples in post-Resurrection events. The disciples, too, could begin to emerge from hiding, buoyed by the presence of the Risen Christ. In a few weeks, we will share Luke's account of the two followers on the Road to Emmaus.

Rollercoasters are nothing new to us, as we experience them in our own lives as well and thus endure our own emotional and sometimes physical rollercoasters. We have been through all kinds of twists, turns, ascents, and descents in our lives. Yet, when the ride seems to be over, we get back into line to start something all over again. That is not say that there are some rollercoasters we choose not to get on again. But more often than not, we find ourselves in line yet again.

Our spiritual journeys can also be described as rollercoaster rides. How many of us are lifelong members of a Congregational church? Others have joined us from different denominations, possibly because they found themselves plunged into a deep drop, out of which showed no signs of ascent. Those who went through that journey didn't quit; they chose to get back in line to ride again, knowing that there would be

some peaks and valleys. Maybe we chose not to ride again, or we found some of the simpler spiritual rollercoasters that we could handle.

Every single one of us here today chose to get back in line for a spiritual journey, a spiritual rollercoaster, if you will. We have reached the ultimate ascent of the Resurrection as we celebrate another Easter that dispels the depths of descent. My prayer for all of us this Easter is that we can enjoy the view from the top, we can revel in our relationship with God, we can give thanks for the gift of the Resurrection, and that we continue to get back in line after each spiritual rollercoaster ride.

Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen, indeed!