

# IMMERSE

A JOURNAL OF FAITH, LIFE AND YOUTH MINISTRY

## Living in Post-Easter Mode

By: Libbie Patterson

*After 22 years as an administrator and faculty member at Fuller Theological Seminary, Libbie Patterson is a consultant to seminaries and colleges, a speaker/retreat leader, and a spiritual director. She's also an elder in the PC (USA) church and WAS A member of the SoulShaper board for Youth Specialties. In her free time she can be found in the garden, on the golf course, at the opera or playing with kids.*

Easter has come and gone, and we who celebrated Christ's resurrection move back into the predictable rhythms of daily life. We've finished with our Lenten practices, we've marked the events of Holy week—waving palms, washing feet, partaking in Last Suppers, attending the beautiful services that mark the final hours of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The holiest time in the Christian calendar has come and gone for another year.

Paul Harvey, whose radio broadcasts made him a household name for many years, had a sequence titled "The Rest of the Story." Each story came with a punchline of some kind, providing either a startling or comforting encore to some real-life tale. It was his way of letting us know that endings are not always as they seem.

Have you ever read some of the stories in the Bible and wondered what happened next? I've often pondered the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. What happened after that? Can your life ever go back to normal when you've been raised from the grave? How did people treat him? What did his first meal feel like, his first sleeping and waking, the first time he took a walk down the dusty roads between Bethany and Jerusalem? At home again with his sisters, how long did it take before the novelty of being *Lazarus* wore off?

I've tried to imagine what it would be like to live in the grip of such an experience as the one Lazarus had. We've all experienced moments, large or small, that hint at it: good news from a medical exam, the split-second avoidance of an accident, a lost child found safe—you can fill in your own

stories. After these moments, the very air we breathe feels light and sweet around us. Life has returned, and it is good.

I once had a court appearance, scheduled for Good Friday. It was nothing major—a speeding ticket that I had decided to challenge because the officer who stopped me had written the old speed limit on the ticket (the limit had been raised a week earlier). On my day in court, the officer did not appear, meaning that the ticket was expunged from my record and I was free to leave. I practically danced out of that courtroom, thinking all sorts of Good Friday and Easter thoughts about how it feels to be set free from sins. (Because yes, I had been speeding, even though it wasn't as much as the extra ten miles the officer had written.)

But what about the rest of the story? Did my accelerator foot get heavy again? Eventually, yes. Memory often fades, and old habits resume. And perhaps that is what happened with Lazarus. Or with Tabitha, or with the man formerly known as Legion, or the bent-over woman, or the myriad of other scriptural stories of people who were set free for new life. How many resurrection stories are there as a result of Jesus' resurrection? Hundreds of thousands of stories, because you and I have been given new life as well. The story of Easter is the story of my resurrection, and yours, and of all who believe. That big experience is *our* experience. We are Lazarus, no matter what our circumstances, no matter what the realities of health or troubles that mark our days.

How do we live, post Easter? For fifty days between Easter and Pentecost we live in a time of Easter celebration. Following that, the liturgical calendar enters what is called "ordinary time." Ordinary time! No time is ordinary when we are living new life. But how do we live that new life on a daily basis? How long before Lazarus started to take for granted that he could go to sleep because he would wake up the next morning? How long before Martha became irritated with him for some breach of duty? How long before we wake up in a bad mood or find the tasks of ordinary life, or our family members or the weather irritating, banal, boring, not what we would like?

The reality is, we can't live constantly at an Easter-morning pitch. If we could, Pentecost would not be necessary. We need God's Spirit with us on a daily basis. We need the gift of trust that—whether "our hearts burn within us" on a daily basis—the God whose Son died for us is living with us and walks our particular roads with us.

Easter resurrection does not provide us with the Paul Harvey-esque specifics. But it assures us that, for each of us, there is "the rest of the story"—and that story *will* end well.