

Karl Ove Knausgaard is a Norwegian writer who definitely has done something no other writer has ever done. To quote a reviewer of his novel, *My Struggle*, Knausgaard has written a “3,600-page Norwegian novel about a man writing a six-volume, 3,600-page Norwegian novel.”<sup>1</sup> That of course means the main character in the book is the author himself.

In the second volume, Knausgaard offers these observations about our earthly lives: “We might believe that our world embraced everything, we might do our thing down here on the beach, drive around in our cars, phone each other and chat, visit one another, eat and drink and sit indoors imbibing the faces and opinions and the fates of those appearing on the TV screen in this strange, semi-artificial symbiosis we inhabited and lull ourselves for longer and longer, year upon year, into thinking it was all there was...

“But the stars twinkle above our heads, the sun shines, the grass grows, and the earth, yes the earth, it swallows all life and eradicates all vestiges of it, spews out new life in a cascade of limbs and eyes, leaves and nails, hair and tails, cheeks and fur and guts, and swallows it up again.”<sup>2</sup> In the novel, this reflection about life and death occurred while the author was taking a walk just before his family celebrated his mother’s sixtieth birthday.

A day or two later, the family gathered at a church in Norway for the baptism of the author’s first-born child. This most likely was a Lutheran congregation since nearly three out of four Norwegians are Lutheran. Knausgaard noted: “the priest was a young woman.” The next largest church in Norway, with only 2.4% of Norway’s population, is Catholic, and there are no women priests in the Catholic Church.

After the baptism, the author surprised himself and his family by walking up to the altar to receive communion: “I, a fervent anti-Christian from early teenage years and a materialist in my heart of hearts, had in one second, without any reflection, got to my feet, walked up the aisle, and knelt in front

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<sup>1</sup> Leland de la Durantaye, *The New York Times Book Review*, quoted in “Praise for *My Struggle*” on first inner leaf of Karl Ove Knausgaard’s *My Struggle, Book 2: A Man in Love*, English translation by Don Bartlett (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Karl Ove Knausgaard, *My Struggle, Book 2: A Man in Love* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013) English translation by Don Bartlett, pp. 447-448.

of the altar. It had been pure impulse.”<sup>3</sup>

Knausgaard realized that he had begun to “think differently about Jesus Christ, for it was about flesh and blood, it was about birth and death, and we were linked to it through our bodies and our blood, those we beget and those we bury, constantly, continually, a storm blew through our world and it always had, and the only place I knew where this was formulated, the most extreme yet simplest things, was in these holy scriptures.”<sup>4</sup>

That pretty much describes all of us here today. We find ourselves somewhere between birth and death in our bodies, in our flesh and blood, and in church reflecting on scripture. Later, most of us also will come to the altar. We will hear the words, “The body of Christ given for you,” and we will eat. Then we will hear the words, “The blood of Christ shed for you,” and we will drink. Some of you have never done this and are here for your family. For others, it may have been years. Easter has a way of bringing people into church that do not normally attend, just as baptisms and funerals do. Still others here now received communion at the first and foremost celebration of the resurrection, the Vigil of Easter, last night. [And some of us even had communion just a few hours ago at the 8:30 service earlier this morning.]

But for those who do commune today, however long it has been since we last did so, the Holy Spirit has called and gathered the people of Jesus here now because Easter is about life itself in all its messy mystery. We may not understand why and we may have doubts and questions, but some part of most of us has come to trust, seeks to believe, or hopes that Jesus was crucified and resurrected for us.

So that’s why we are here: to hear the old, old story of Jesus and his unconquerable love once again. It’s the story of a love that refused to be deterred by the cross. It’s the story of a love that even death could not defeat.

In the college town of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, there is a popular watering hole named “He’s Not Here.” For nearly forty-five years, when people call the bar on the telephone, those are the first words they hear. Can you imagine how disorienting and bewildering it must be to a caller who happens to dial the bar’s phone number by mistake to be greeted with the words “He’s Not

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 452.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 453.

Here?”

It was sort of like that for the women who went to the tomb. They had been through a lot already, having witnessed the ghastly crucifixion and then the burial of Jesus. Now, in the midst of their PTSD, there's an earthquake at the tomb. An angel appears, rolls back the stone, tells them not to be afraid, and shares more shocking news about Jesus: "He's not here; for he has been raised." Then the angel gives them a job to do: "go quickly and tell his disciples."

So the women leave the tomb with a new emotional cocktail now. Their heartbeats must have been racing and their thoughts spinning in confusion. When Jesus himself greets them, they grasp his feet in absolute amazement. Yes, these are the same feet they had seen pierced on the cross just two days ago. The holes are still visible; but now these feet are supporting his body as he stands before them. "Do not be afraid," says Jesus. "Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Do not be afraid - afraid of what, a dead man walking? Not exactly: Jesus wasn't dead, or at least he wasn't any more. Maybe the thing the women feared most was the capricious uncertainty of life. Just when you think you know what's going on (e.g., that when people die, they stay dead), all of a sudden you're confronted with a grand exception to the rule. That's what's scary - that while, as Knausgaard writes, we "drive around in our cars, phone each other and chat, visit one another, eat and drink and sit indoors imbibing the faces and opinions and the fates of those appearing on the TV screen"<sup>5</sup> as if this were all there is, there is a great deal more going on around us and within us.

This was why Henry David Thoreau said he went to live in a tiny cabin at Walden Pond: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."<sup>6</sup> It's scary to think that we might be living life as commonplace, ordinary, and entirely understandable only to discover when we're at the point of death that life is a holy mystery. This was the truth proclaimed by the presence of the crucified and resurrected Christ standing before the two Marys.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 447-448.

<sup>6</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 81.

Common sense told our ancestors for ages that the sun rises and sets. But for centuries we've known that, even though we still speak of sunrise and sunset, it only appears to be that way. We live on the surface of a planet spinning on its axis and orbiting a star. We've seen and thrown balls spinning through the air. It's a common, ordinary, everyday activity done all around the world, often by children. While we've done that (and everything else we've done for every moment of our lives), you and I have been riding on a ball, a planet spinning through space, as we are at this very moment.

Christ confronts us with a great deal more than the holy mystery of life on Easter. He doesn't just stand there for the women to gaze at his feet and worship him. Jesus gives them a command: "Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

"Go and tell" is part of the Gospel at Easter, just as it is at Christmas. After the shepherds went to Bethlehem and "found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger," they told others about Jesus.<sup>7</sup> The words of the Christmas carol "Go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born," and of today's Gospel, "Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me" are both commands to mission.

The shape of our worship each Sunday reflects this mission-focused, sending activity. If you have a hymnal near you, please open it to pages 92 and 93 in the front - page numbers are at the bottom of the page... You'll see on those pages that there are four basic parts of each service of Holy Communion: Gathering, Word, Meal, and Sending. The summary statement about Sending reads, "God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world."

In the days to come, where will God send you? Jesus sent the women from the tomb to find the men and to tell them to meet him in Galilee. Perhaps he sent you to meet him here today. Now, whom does Jesus send you to find? Who needs to hear the good news of the resurrection from you? How will you tell it? Who do you know who is sick, grieving, and in pain who could benefit from your presence and support? How will you share the good news that life, even though it includes suffering, death, and separation, also includes resurrection and reunion? And how will you live life as a holy gift of God to be celebrated not only on Easter, but every day, and especially every Sunday?

Alleluia. Christ is risen. Therefore, let us keep the feast. And let us go from here to share the good news of Easter with others every day. Alleluia. Alleluia.

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<sup>7</sup> Luke 2:16-17.

Alleluia. Amen!