

Easter, Year C  
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St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI  
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I want you to cast your mind back to the 1980s. And if you weren't around yet, you can google it later. Big hair. Bright colors. Shoulder pads. The styles were distinctive. But what I remember most is that people in the 80s could not get enough of the polo shirt. Think about the way that we all went a little bit mad for it in those days. Every handsome young thing – man or woman – would put on that crisp polo and make sure to pop up the collar. Was there anything cooler than that? Some very brave souls might even wear two polo shirts so that the other kids could see two different colored collars popping up at the same time. This was advanced mall fashion.

Somehow, through the magic of television, I got it in my head that I wanted to wear two polo shirts at the same time – one purple and one hot pink. Now I am from a very small town in the middle of nowhere, so it's possible that they were not ready for the kind of fashion thunder I was bringing to the junior high school. Nonetheless, I popped my pink collar and went about my business with the absolute self-involvement only a teenager can manage. As you might imagine, I received a few comments. One, in particular, I will never forget: someone said to me, "boys don't wear pink." Which, even at the time, I thought was a little dumb, since I, a boy, was standing there, clearly wearing the heck out of a pink polo.

It was somewhere around then that I decided some rules are very stupid and needed to be broken. At the time, for me, it was a matter of survival. But as an adult and as a priest, I have begun to see rule-breaking as one of the best traditions imparted to us as followers of Jesus.

The rules say you may not heal on the sabbath. Jesus heals anyway. They say you may not have female disciples. Look at Mary Magdalene, without whom none of us would be here celebrating Easter this morning. The priests say you have to come to the Temple in Jerusalem to meet God. Jesus hangs out with John the Baptist over at the river Jordan far from the center of political and religious power. The rules say you may not converse with the poor, because they must be poor on account of some great sin either they or their parents committed. In defiance of those rules, Jesus loved every one of those hungry and poor people, even when the temple would have nothing to do with them.

And then, in a real plot twist if it's the first time you've heard the story: The rules say you may not rise from the dead. And guess what? God breaks the rules spectacularly. Humbles the haughty. Empties out all the rooms in hell. And comes to us this morning, announcing that we should not fear death, not underestimate the power of life, and not put too much stock in the rules of this world that twist and pervert love. Boys really do wear pink, as it turns out.

I know that Easter is filled with bunnies and eggs and ham – what is with Wisconsinites and ham, by the way?? But that's just the fluff on top. Easter is a celebration of unending life and unlimited love. Imagine every atom of this universe: each proton and every neutron buoyed by love. Imagine a limitless field of stars in the heavens, and each one is ringing this morning with the sound of divine life and divine love. When the women went to the tomb, they knew how this was going to end. They knew that they would find their friend, their teacher, lying there dead. And yet, God did something absolutely bananas that morning. God broke the rules of death right along with the gates of hell.

So, St. Mark's, what rules are you going to break this Easter season? What things is the world telling you are set in stone? Because God is calling us to roll away that stone and to be surprised by the love at the center of creation. Perhaps the rules are telling you that we cannot ever have a just society. Let's break those rules. Perhaps the rules are telling us that our city needs to remain the most segregated city in the country? Let's break those rules. Maybe the rules are telling us that war and violence are the only answers to difficult problems. Let's turn those swords into plowshares and get to work breaking those rules.

So, have your ham if you must, but take sixty seconds sometime today in contemplation of the miracle that is the love of God. Take a moment to consider the way that Christ is alive in your heart and your soul, the way that Christ is alive in the middle of this community, the way that Christ is alive in the bread and the wine made holy for the sustaining of our lives. Love came down at Christmas, but love broke all the rules at Easter. You are made magnificent simply because God decided to do something different on that first Easter morning. You are made new. You are made holy. And death has been transformed. So wear whatever damn color you want, and happy easter. Amen.