

Easter 2017

What if it's true –What now?

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Who are you and *why*?

Who are you -- and why?

That was the first question on the first college application that I filled out.

I stared at it blankly.

I was sixteen. I had no idea who I was, let alone *why*.

I was kinda hoping that college would be where I figured that out.

Who are you and why. I mean *really*.

I remember the question -- obviously.

I have *no* memory of my answer,

which is too bad,

because I'm still trying to figure out who I am and why,

and it would be great to see my answer.

But whatever that answer was, somebody was apparently convinced by it, because my first college application also turned into my first college acceptance.

And, holy cow, is there any better feeling than – acceptance? Yes! Phew!

Back in those olden days, you ran to the mailbox and you looked for the letter from the college and if it was a **fat** envelope, then YES, you were golden, you were in!

Nowadays you get an email, which doesn't seem quite the same -- how do you get a fat email??

But still – it’s the best feeling in the world, right? You’re accepted!
Someone wants you.

Then you get older and find out that the best feeling in the world happens again, when you got a job.

You’ve agonized over every word in your cover letter, the font choice for your resume.

You’ve sweated through interviews where people have asked you questions like “are you more of a hunter or a gatherer?”.

And then one day, the phone rings, and hallelujah, you’re in.

Best feeling in the world. You’re accepted! Somebody wants you.

In a couple weeks, wedding season starts in earnest around here.

Saturday after Saturday, there will be couples standing right here at front, holding each other’s hands tightly and speaking their vows to each other.

Their parents will cry, **they** will cry, and I will already be crying from the moment they walk in.

In getting ready for those weddings, we do a lot of premarital meetings with those couples.

And of course I always ask *how did you meet* -- these days it’s usually online -- and *when did you get engaged?*

And their eyes light up, and they giggle, and they tell me –

we were at my favorite restaurant, we were at the beach, he surprised me on vacation, or sometimes, it’s: we just knew.

And see, that there is the best feeling in the world, too --because there it is again: you’re accepted. Somebody wants you.

You're accepted. Someone knows who you are and why, and it works for them. *You're accepted.*

Best feeling in the world.

And what Easter is saying is -- that's how you can feel all the time.

All the time.

My little sermon assignment today is this:

what if this Easter story is really **really** true.

What difference would that make, right now, here, you, me, 2017?

And that's the answer.

What I just told you, that's the answer.

The difference it would make?

The difference it would make if this Easter story is really true?

It would mean knowing,

deep down **knowing** every day that you are accepted.

That someone -- a **big** someone -- knows who **you** are and why and loves you exactly because of

and in spite of that.

Here's the Easter good news in a nutshell:

Jesus went to the cross for us.

And God made him alive again -- for us.

And because of all that, we know, we know that we are loved.

Because by going to the cross, Jesus showed us that there was *nothing* that he wouldn't do for us.

And by bringing him back to us, God showed that there is nothing that can get in the way of God's love for us.

So what if all that's true?

Well, then that's the best feeling in the world.

We are loved – adored.

We are more than accepted: we are wanted, we are needed, we are cherished.

If the Easter story is true,

it's the biggest, fattest, acceptance envelope ever.

And guess what? It **is** true.

Which means that we get to live every single day with our spirits tapped into that same deep well of joy

that any happy couple finds

any second semester high school senior

anyone who just heard "yes, there's a place for you."

We get to live in the *constant* assurance that we are loved.

And, let's face it, we **need** that.

Because sometimes the envelopes are thin.

And sometimes the answer is no.

And sometimes the person you gave your heart to stops answering your texts.

Sometimes life is really, really hard,

in ways that I can't capture in my words,

but that you know all too well in the shadows of your soul.

Sometimes the answer was no.

And so you need, we need, we all need,
that assurance that SOMEONE loves us and is with us.
You need, we **all** need, to know that we are accepted, loved, cherished by
One who never leaves our side.
And knowing that, knowing that,
makes all the difference in the world.

So **choose** to believe the “what if.”
Choose to live in a world in which an empty tomb is possible.
Choose to live in a world where love is stronger than the darkest night.
Choose a world where God’s love is greater than our brokenness,
greater than our sorrows,
greater than our doubts.
Choose to believe that there is *nothing* that can separate us from that love.

Who are you and why?
There’s only one who truly knows.
And that one accepts you,
cherishes you,
needs you, loves you,
and never, *ever* leaves your side.

Happy Easter! Amen.