



123: Practice Your Life

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 123.

This is a podcast about making decisions but also about making a life. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation, or just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment, you're in the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer and a simple next right step.

Today I'm letting my spiritual formation roots show a little bit, and while I don't quote a lot of scripture in the episode itself, so much of this short reflection is born in many ways out of my favorite book of the Bible, which is Colossians because the most stunning truth in all of scripture is the gospel of Jesus. Not just the "He died for us" part, of course that, but the whole story of Jesus, how he was born and lived and died and rose again. And also how we were born and live and died and rose too. I'm getting ahead of myself.

Just know as I share some of these thoughts that aren't even fully cooked yet, that they stem from my obsession with the "mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." That's a direct quote from Colossians 1:27 and merely a portion of the riches that are found in that entire first chapter, really, the entire book of Colossians. For now, I'm glad you're here and maybe it will help to know that it all started with the moon in April. Listen in.

Our shared love for sky things must have started with Hally's comment. It was 1986 in Southern Indiana, and my mom and her friend Irene took me and my sister out to the cornfield beside Shiloh Baptist church in the middle of the night. I remember the cold and the darkness, the weirdness of being awake when everybody else was sleeping, and the anticipation of seeing something grand that only comes around every 75 years or so. I was nine years old, and I think it was Dad who told me and my sister that our generation had the chance to witness this historic moment twice in our lifetimes. Once when we are very young, and again, when we'll be very old. As it turned out, the comet, if I even actually saw it, was underwhelming, but it didn't matter. The grownups said this was a big deal, and I believed them every word. When it comes to spectacular things in the sky, I've been believing them ever since.

Back in August 2017, when the straight line of darkness sailed across the United States in the middle of the day, my sister was one of the lucky ones who experienced the solar eclipse in the path of totality. To this day, I don't think she's fully told me the extent to which those stunning moments of total darkness in

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the middle of a sunny summer day changed her life because she loves me and she knows how desperately I wanted to be there too, and she didn't want to rub it in. Last week, she reminded me as we got off the phone to remember to look for the full moon that night. This one's called the Pink Moon.

Wondering why they call it that, I did a little search and learned that April's full moon is named so, not because it's literally pink in the sky, which of course is what I thought, but it was a nickname given by the Native Americans after a flower that blooms in early spring and the Eastern part of the United States.

In our town, it's not easy to see the moon this time of year unless it's risen far above the treeline. By then, it's already so high in the sky though that it tends to lose some of its full moon glory. But I did manage to find a small glimpse of the Pink Moon in the opening of the trees over a road in our neighborhood, and I loved the sight.

In my reading about the Pink Moon, I learned that the first full moon of spring is also called the Paschal Moon. If you've never known or Googled why the date for Easter changes every year, fun fact, it's because Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon of spring.

In its simplest form, the word Paschal is another word for Passover or Easter, but the truest meaning of Paschal is more of a transformative process. For those in the Catholic tradition, this word might be more familiar, but for the rest of us, it could be an interesting study.

Ronald Rolheiser, the same one who says that thing about how we get into trouble whenever we don't name things properly, well he also says this, he says, quote "The Paschal mystery is the mystery of how we, after undergoing some kind of death, receive new life and new spirit."

With Easter just a few days ago, the new life part may be fresh on our minds, but that kind of life, the kind that's new, is only the kind that comes after death. There are two kinds of death, and Rolheiser emphasizes this in his book, *The Holy Longing*. There's terminal death, the kind that ends life and possibility. There's also Paschal death. It's just as real, but it's the kind of death that opens the person up to a deeper and richer kind of life. There's two kinds of that, too.

There's resuscitated life where someone is brought back or restored to a former state of life and health. Then there's resurrection life where the old life has gone completely and a brand new life emerges. This resurrection life we celebrate is not a redo of the same old life as before. This is a brand new kind of life. The old one is over, the new one is here.

So that process between releasing that old life and experiencing the new one, this is the Paschal mystery and this process doesn't just happen one time in our life. We are always being invited into the cycle, a thin place through which we're always walking. While our salvation was indeed a one-time thing, 2 Corinthians 4 reminds us that our inner life continues to be renewed day by day in every transition, in every grief, in every good by disappointment, offense, breakup, misunderstanding and ending. There is the potential for this Paschal mystery, this union with the life of Christ.

This time of year, we hear a lot about the letting go of the old and embracing the new and these are, of course, part of the cycle of transformation. But these are the bookends. And trouble comes when we

rushed through the middle. What comes in between either because we don't know there's a middle to have or because no one's ever named the process for us? What does this mean for us as we walk through our own losses? Perhaps the way of life as we knew it has died, a new way of life has emerged.

Both Good Friday and resurrection have happened, but we still have a choice to make. We can either let this be a terminal kind of death with no possibility of experiencing the hope. We can be stuck in regret, anger, unforgiveness and despair. Or we can name our loss, fully aware of the pain name, what's new, even if it's not what we expect it, but that's not all. We still need time and space to grieve that loss, to set the old life free and finally to receive the new life that we are in fact already living.

Often we talk about waiting for resurrection life as if it's something that's going to happen to us from the outside later, but the resurrection has already happened. The question is, are we cooperating with the new life waiting to be lived in us or are we trying to resuscitate the old life because it's all we know?

Do we hide our grief, our fear, our pain, our anger, and our losses because we think there's no place for those words in Christian hope? Or are we finally beginning to understand to see that our grief, fear, pain, anger, and all of our losses can be the doorways through which our hope is finally realized?

Have we called something terminal that has the potential to be Paschal? I don't want to settle for death if life is a possibility. I don't want to hang onto the old if the new is waiting in the wings to be born and embraced and discovered. I don't want to fear the future if there is Paschal possibility within it. Our friend Jesus says there is. This is a way to practice our life, not necessarily life as we know it, but perhaps life as we don't yet know it.

If this all feels like a bit too much. If your head is spinning from considering how life and death might be showing up in your world today, perhaps your next right thing is not to try to figure it all out, but to simply ask God one simple question, what do I need to know about my life?

If there's something he wants you to know, he is kind, capable and wise enough to tell you. One last thing about this pink Paschal moon: it was also this month a supermoon, which means it's the closest the moon will be to the earth all year. During these months of social distancing, the moon draws close. Let's remember to look for all the ways our God shows up in nature as we simply do our next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 123 of The Next Right Thing.

I hope this simple practice of practicing your life can be just one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow because it's true. This is a podcast about making decisions. The bigger truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives.

Y'all, I promise, my intention was to do a lighthearted episode this week, but instead that Paschal moon took me deep into the theology of the resurrection. I am sorry, and you're welcome.

Maybe next time I'll come with a list of favorite things I'm into right now. Wouldn't that be fun? I mean,

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I always love episodes like that. Well, until then, you can always find me at emilypfreeman.com or on instagram [@emilypfreeman](https://www.instagram.com/emilypfreeman). I'll close with one final quote from *The Holy Longing*, a reminder of the choice we have in the midst of every transition. Rolheiser writes, "We face many deaths within our lives, and the choice is ours as to whether those deaths will be terminal snuffing out life and spirit, or whether they will be Paschal opening us up to new life in new spirit. Grieving is the key to the latter."

Thanks for listening and I'll see you next time.

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