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Think of a time you had something so amazing happen that it was hard to believe it was real, but then you just had to tell everyone about it... Last week I discovered something so amazing early on Monday morning as I was using Google to search for something on the Internet. I exclaimed, “I can’t believe it” as an announcement indicated that they had just release a beta version of a new search engine: Google Nose, a database of 15 million smells. The instructions indicated you could click on a picture of an object and place your nose near the screen and that the digitized scent would come from the screen.

Technology is amazing, but I couldn’t believe they somehow found the means to send smells through the computer, so I tried it. I clicked on a rose, then an orange, waiting for the beautiful scent to emerge from my computer. I didn’t get a very strong aroma, so I clicked on the help instructions. I read that if one could not smell anything, it could be that some computers are not compatible with

this latest technology or because it was April 1, April Fool’s Day! Needless to say, I didn’t go around telling the story about Google Nose.

Peter encountered something 2000 years ago even more amazing than Google Nose, and it changed his life forever—and it was something he wanted to walk about. Let’s first remember what he was like before he encountered the events of Easter morning. Remember how he had been the one to deny knowing Jesus when others recognized Peter while he stood near an evening fire waiting to see what would happen to Jesus? Remember how he was the impulsive one to jump into the water to see Jesus but found himself sinking? Remember the time he blurted out that Jesus was the Messiah and Jesus told him to keep quiet about it? It seems as though Peter didn’t always think through what he said or did (something many of us may identify with), and yet in the Book of Acts we encounter Peter proclaiming words about Jesus—even though he had been ordered to keep quiet. What a

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change—from one who tried to pretend he didn't know Jesus to finding himself in jail for talking about Jesus!

What would you do while sitting in jail? I'm not sure what I would do if I found myself sitting in jail, but I doubt I would have done what another famous person did in April fifty years ago in Birmingham, Alabama. Martin Luther King, Jr. had been arrested for leading a nonviolent protest against the racial segregation of the city government and downtown retailers. Since he had no pads of paper in jail on which to write, King wrote around the margins of newspapers and gave the pieces to those who visited him, whereby the pieces were assembled together like a jigsaw puzzle and published on April 16. He wrote his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"¹ in response to a letter written by a group of clergy. This group did recognize that social injustices existed, but they criticized King for taking the issue into the streets, feeling that he should instead let the courts decide the outcome. King argued in his

letter that when anyone suffers, everyone is affected, and that they had already waited long enough for something to happen. He freed his words from the jail cell to let others know of the injustices being committed.

Thousands of years earlier Peter found himself freed from jail in order that he could proclaim a similar message. In the face of the injustices in the world, Peter told the good news of the Easter story—that the message of Jesus was still alive and could free people from their bondage. When the prison guards arrived at the cell the next morning and discovered the jail was empty, they told officials, "The men you put in prison are standing outside and teaching the people!"

Once again Peter was brought before the officials, who exclaimed, "Look, we gave you strict orders not to teach," but Peter replied that they obeyed God rather than what others told them to do.

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I wonder—how often do we let the cruel words of others create prison cells for our lives? Someone makes an off-handed comment to a young child who is singing while playing, “Be quiet; you can’t sing.” The words seep deep inside, with the result that the child stops singing and begins to believe she can’t sing. And although she has a lovely voice and is asked to sing later in life, the girl explains, “I can’t sing.” Or someone told as a youth, “You’re not good enough,” struggles to find self-worth as an adult decades later.

Recently I read about a young man² who has been very active in his congregation. He taught in the religious education program, served as a worship leader, and visited the homebound. When he got married, he and his spouse went on a honeymoon. When he returned to the church, he heard freeing words in a sermon on justice and equality, but later that week the pastor called him into the church office and told him, “I’m sorry, you can no longer be involved in leadership in our

church due to your marriage to another man.” For some people, the words *gay marriage* create a prison within their minds, preventing them from recognizing the rights of those who choose to live in a way that differs from their own lifestyles.

Sometimes we have to break beyond the barriers of the prisons that try to limit us, which I think is something the recently elected Pope has tried to convey in his visits to inmates in prison. On Maundy Thursday Pope Francis visited a juvenile detention center and washed the feet of inmates, reflecting the action that Jesus did for his disciples. Although previous Popes have engaged in the foot washing ceremony with men, this Pope moved beyond the traditional walls to include women and Muslims, implying they too are followers of God. In a sense, he’s opening doors to a broader image of what God is like. God doesn’t ask whether we are male or female, Christian or Muslim, gay or straight. God breaks open the doors of our limited views and welcomes everyone into God’s realm, even those

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who don't look like us or those we may not particularly like.

God strives to offer freeing words of grace and acceptance, but God also strives to free our words so that we can boldly proclaim what God is doing in the world.

This morning I invite you to find words that describe what God is doing in the world, but let's start nearby. What do you see God doing in our congregation? How do you see God working among us to bring hope into the world? ...

The Easter story didn't end last week, for if the story ended on that day, we would not be here today celebrating what God has done in the world. May you continue to free your words to tell the story of what God freely offers to the world.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Letter_from_Birmingham_Jail

² Ross Murray, GAY MAN REMOVED FROM CATHOLIC PARISH INVOLVEMENT AFTER MARRIAGE, www.glaad.org/blog/gay-man-removed-catholic-parish-involvement-after-marriage, April 3, 2013.