LIVE MORE. LOVE MORE. LEARN MORE.

April 17, 2014

Dear Friends,

Easter is my favorite holiday. Yes, I know the origin of the name is pre-Christian, the precise date to celebrate has been a persistent matter of controversy between various branches of Christianity, and that bunnies don’t lay eggs. But what I like about Easter is that it is a time when the world refocuses on the most important event in the history of humanity; the day we were reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

I hope and pray you have a wonderful Easter weekend. And that you use this time to share the good news that the same Lord who came and died for us, will return to take us to a home He has prepared.

All the very best,

James

MISTS

I almost never rent a GPS. I like to figure out my own way. A friend told me it’s a “man thing”. Maybe it is. But I think it’s something more. I like to understand how a city knits together. Driving to directions leaves me with a superficial familiarity; driving without them demands attention to detail. And, I suppose, I’ve found my way around cities from Moscow to Manhattan without a GPS, so why would I need one to visit Melbourne?
It’s for that reason I was hopelessly lost early one morning recently. I knew where I was going. I’d been there before. But as I drove back and forth on roads that all seemed to look the same in the predawn haze, I just couldn’t find the right turnoff. Like in a dream, I was lost in a mental fog, entirely incapable of finding my way home—home to my father.

A dirty dawn broke through overcast skies as I stumbled on the narrow entrance to the “memorial park” I was searching for. On this day, the home I was visiting was his final resting place to reflect on the profound silence that is death.

Visiting my father’s grave is always an intensely emotional experience. When I visited it a year after his death, I noticed his was the only gravestone in the row that didn’t have even a single flower on it. This man who once could command an enthusiastic audience in much of the world, a man whose hands had healed people around the globe, a man whose books sat on shelves from Sydney to Saskatchewan; completely alone in death. Without even a flower to mark his grave.

I went to a florist and bought artificial flowers so that at least his grave would be marked by one sign of remembrance, love, respect.

Not long after my dad’s death, his belongings burned up in the Black Saturday fires. So, in a matter of months, he was gone, his belongings were gone, and all that was left were ethereal memories. Even the best of us, the greatest of us, the kindest and bravest, disappear into dust. I knew that. I just never expected it could happen so quickly. And never imagined it would happen to my dad.

On this day, it wasn’t the flowers, the dawn, the fresh dug graves or the slow dribble from an indifferent sky that caught my attention. It was one of the graves nearby. There, on a gravestone not so far from where I was standing mourning my lost father, smiled the prettiest of girls. The picture was new—like it had been taken yesterday. There were a couple more photos of her, arranged like a schoolgirl’s scrapbook. The inscription told of a family’s anguish for their little angel.

Who was she? How did she die so young? I could only guess. That she was a bright, attractive girl full of life was clear. And yet, here she was, a beautiful girl who would never be anything else in this world.

I paused and looked into the eyes of this beautiful young girl. How could someone so lovely, so precious, so perfect, be dead? Gone. Buried. And then I thought of my own child who died in utero. My child who never had a chance to laugh, sing, to be pretty, cute, grand
or bold. My child who I would give everything I have to hold, to comfort, to share a little of this life with. To tickle, play, run and laugh.

But that isn’t how life is.

We don’t get second acts here.

In milliseconds, accidents take the wisdom and love of fathers away from their children.

For no good reason, beautiful girls die.

And sometimes parents, full of hope and joy, leave the hospital without words to express the hole torn in their hearts.

That is the world we live in.

It feels like an incoherent joke of darkest proportions. Except for one slim hope. A hope we can only grasp with our broken fingers clinging to a slippery rock of faith; a Saviour we cannot see; a Lord who, in our darkest moments, can seem so far away, lost in mists of space, enthroned in a heaven that is divided from us by an impenetrable barrier. A Saviour who Himself felt the despair of separation; the agony of affliction. A God who understands my depth of loss, because He experienced it Himself.