How would we manage without YouTube? Once upon a time people wrote moving songs and the sun set over shimmering lakes while flocks of geese wafted elegantly by. But we never assumed the two belonged together until YouTube taught us to. Once upon a time puppy dogs did embarrassing acts and toddlers said cute things and cars reversed into lamp-posts and occasionally a home movie captured all three, maybe even in the same frame – but only in the era of YouTube have we learned to pass links to such wonders on to friends and family with a little smily face in the bottom of our email.

I’m sure everybody here knows what it means to play a game of dominoes. Nobody exactly agrees on the rules, of course, about things like whether you put the double six sideways at the beginning of the game or not, and whether you judge who comes second by the combined number of dots on the remaining pieces. But every single person in the whole wide world who has ever played a game of dominoes agrees on one single thing: there comes a point in every game when you lose interest in the regular rules and start to make a long snake by lining every piece up on its end about an inch apart and then watching them topple over. And YouTube gives us the proof: because there you will find thousands of people have deemed their efforts of lining up and then toppling over myriad upon countless myriad of dominoes in ever more elaborate cascades are worthy of viewing by the whole world.

Think about that cascade of dominoes for a moment. And think about its metaphorical power. On July 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, was shot by a Serbian assassin in Sarajevo. Austria-Hungary prepared for war with Serbia. Russia prepared to defend Serbia against Austria-Hungary. Germany prepared to defend Austria-Hungary against Russia. France prepared to defend Russia against Germany. Germany prepared to attack France through Belgium. Britain prepared to defend Belgium against Germany. The Turks rallied behind Germany. Japan rallied behind Britain. Within a month, all were at war. The first domino fell; and the rest came tumbling down. Four years later, 15 million people were dead.

Think about Rwanda. Before the Belgians came, the minority Tutsi had ruled over the majority Hutu. The colonial Belgians exacerbated the tensions between the peoples, and by the time they left, the Tutsis held almost all the political and economic power, while the Hutus were mostly landless and poor. In 1962 the Hutus overthrew the Tutsi monarchy and instituted a Hutu republic. In 1990 Tutsis invaded from Uganda and started a civil war. In 1994 the Hutus assassinated their own president and initiated a genocide of Tutsis, killing 800,000 in 100 days. Years later the refugee Tutsis, now in north-eastern Congo, initiated a civil war in the Congo. Again, one domino fell, and then another, and another. And there seems no end to it, even today.

Holy Week tells a story of falling dominoes. One after another disciples, crowd, Pharisees, Romans, Sadducees, scribes, criminals, bystanders, pilgrims all fall down one after another. It’s a domino story. It’s a fall story. It’s a kind of multi-dimensional, violent re-enactment of the story of Adam and Eve. A mixture of temptation, shortsightedness, fear, panic, forgetfulness, stupidity, and rebellion leave practically every character sprawled on the ground like fallen dominoes.

Except one. That’s what we see in Holy Week. We see God, in human form, insert two hands into that cascade of falling dominoes, and say, “Stop.” The dominoes have been falling so fast for so long and so violently that those two hands that get in the way get overwhelmed, get crushed, get obliterated. They get nailed. Because they are divine hands, they have the power to stop even a rampaging torrent of plummeting dominoes. But because they are human hands, they hurt like hell. That’s what happens in the cross. The divinity of humankind says “Stop.” And the humanity of God gets crushed.
But “Stop” doesn’t turn out to be the last word. In the greatest miracle, a miracle not currently available on YouTube but the most wondrous thing that ever happened, God raised Jesus from the dead. And every one of those dominoes, whose combined weight had fallen on and crushed Jesus when he dared to say “Stop,” now slowly, meticulously, mesmerically, is raised back to its full height, to play and be enjoyed again. Every domino had been knocked over by the one behind it. Now every domino was being raised up again by the strength of that very same domino that had knocked it over. “Stop” was an amazing, costly, astonishing, crushing word of God. But “Stop” wasn’t the last word God said. The last word God said – picking up each individual domino and turning it from an agent of the fall to an agent of resurrection – the last word God said, was “Go.”

On November 8, 1997, Gordon Wilson, a 60-year-old draper from Enniskillen, Northern Ireland, and a lifelong Methodist, attended a Veterans Day ceremony at the war memorial in his home town with his daughter, Marie, a nurse. During the ceremony, a bomb planted by the Provisional IRA exploded. It was a massacre. This is how Gordon Wilson described his parting from his beloved daughter, Marie.

She held my hand tightly, and gripped me as hard as she could. She said, 'Daddy, I love you very much.' Those were her exact words to me, and those were the last words I ever heard her say... But I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge. Dirty sort of talk is not going to bring her back to life. She was a great wee lassie. She loved her profession. She was a pet. She's dead. She's in heaven and we shall meet again. I will pray for these men tonight and every night." [William Ury, The Third Side, 1999]

The Northern Irish Troubles had been one long domino chain. Loyalist distrusted British and gerrymandered politics and society to disadvantage Nationalist; nationalist rebelled and were threatened by Loyalist; British intervened to protect Nationalist but ended up being seen as the enemy by Nationalist, whereupon the killing of Loyalist by Nationalist and Nationalist by Loyalist became an almost everyday occurrence for 20 years. Until Gordon Wilson said stop. Until Gordon Wilson said, “I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge. ... I will pray for these men tonight and every night.”

As one historian [Jonathan Bardon] recounts, “No words in more than 25 years of violence in Northern Ireland had such a powerful, emotional impact.” Enniskillen was the lowest moment in the whole history of the Troubles. But, because of one man’s witness, because of one man’s faith, because of one man’s willingness to let Christ work in him when he had no strength of his own, Enniskillen became the day when Northern Ireland began to say “Stop.” And Enniskillen became the day the peace process began to say, “Go.”

As we walk through Holy Week together, we see the fall. From this joyous Palm Sunday, this exuberant day of creation, a day of Hallelujah and rejoicing, we descend to the Fall: we see the falling of one domino after another, and watch each one bring the next one down and the next one and the next. And we see our own fall in the fall of each of these characters, who fall for the same reasons we do. But then we see one character say, “Stop.” And we see a ton of bricks fall on top of him. But because of that “Stop,” there can be a “Go.” Because of the cross, there can be the resurrection. Because Gordon Wilson said what no one else had found it in them to say, people could begin to imagine peace in Ireland.

May this be a holy week for you. May it be a rediscovery of how the whole world falls. May it be a week where you discover where in your life, where in the domino-chain of this world, you can find the strength and the courage and the wisdom to say, “Stop.” And may God turn your human “Stop” into a divine “Go.”