

EASTER: THE FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION

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She stayed away, only because it was the Sabbath. Now, just a few hours after the Sabbath sun has set, the darkness and quietness of the night has settled in. She leaves quietly to make her way back to the tomb. She cannot rest. Cannot eat. Cannot sleep. She shuffles along the path, alone and in the dark. It's hard to walk. The sorrow, like a weight pressing down on her chest, makes her arms and legs feel so heavy. She just has to keep going, putting one foot in front of the other. She must concentrate on walking, must go back there. Her body is moving forward, but her mind won't stop racing. She cannot get the horrendous images of his broken and battered body out of her mind. "Breathe now, woman. Just keep walking – one foot in front of the other. That's it - left, right, left, right. Keep breathing, just keep moving. You'll be there soon."

"Where had it all gone so horribly wrong? How had he gotten it so wrong? Had he not known the level of the hatred and cruelty of his enemies? The unspoken alliance between religious leaders and Roman officials. The persuasive power of that angry crowd yelling louder and louder for punishment, for crucifixion. For blood – his blood.

She is not sure how far, or how long it has taken her to get there. But she rounds the bend in the road and sees it – the place where his body was laid. The numbness clears for a brief moment, and she cannot believe he is dead. There in that tomb he lies- cold, still, lifeless, wrapped in linen grave clothes.

She knows she will only be able to go as far as the stone in front of the tomb's opening. There her path will end. It will have to be enough, just to sit near him, sit outside the slab where he has been laid. Sit where no one will hear her sobs. Where no one will see her body, bowed low, face touching the ground as her chest heaves to throw off some of the unbearable weight of this sorrow and grief.

She looks around her. She must have made a wrong turn somewhere. Surely she has come to the wrong place. No, this is it, this is the place. She is certain of it. But where is the huge stone that she saw them roll into place, sealing him in? Even in death, they cannot leave him in peace? Why would grave robbers want his body?

She turns, grabs up her skirt in her hand, and runs. Left, right, left, right, left, right, left, right. Her legs are not quite so leaden now. She runs, her breath coming faster. Beads of sweat form on her brow. Sweat trickles down her back. Her hair becomes damp with it, loose strands of hair clinging to her face. "Must – tell – the others. Must – tell – Peter – John. His body – stolen. Where – is – he?"

She reaches them and gasps out her news. "Jesus' body – is gone – where – is – he?" Peter and John listen, and quickly turn and take off running in the direction she has just come from.

She rests a few moments. Catches her breath. Then that thought comes again, and she feels her heart begin to beat faster. What if they can't find his body? Now she is scared, so she turns, picks up her skirt once again, and runs. Peter and John are long gone from her sight. Her pace quickens. Left, right, left, right. "Must – get – back – to – the tomb".

Fear drives her now. "Faster. Must – go – faster." Left, right, left, right, left, right. She reaches the tomb. Sees no sign of Peter or John anywhere. Through her tears, she stoops to look inside. Two beings, shimmering in brightest white light are there, saying something to her. "*Woman, why are you weeping?*"

"*They have taken him - my Lord, and I don't know where he is.*" She turns around and meets the gardener.

"*Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?*"

"*If you have moved him, tell me where he is now, and I will take his body away.*"

[Priest sings:]

Raise your weary eyelids Mary, see him living ever more; see his countenance how gracious, see the wounds for you he bore. All the glory of the morning pales before those wounds redeeming. Let your al-le-lu-ias rise!

"MARY".

"RABBONI?!"

[Priest sings:]

Life is yours forever, Mary, for your light is come once more - and the strength of death is broken; now your songs of joy out pour. End-ed now the night of sorrow, love has brought the blessed mor-row. Let your al-le-lu-ias rise!

"GO TO MY BROTHERS AND TELL THEM".

[Priest sings:]

Lift your voice rejoicing, Mary, Christ has risen from the tomb; on the cross a suffering victim, now as victor he is come. Whom your tears in death were mourning, welcome with your smiles returning. Let your al-le-lu-ias rise!

Mary did as Jesus told her, told the other disciples - "*I have seen the Lord*".

And here we are today, gathered as part of what Episcopal Presiding Bishop Michael Curry calls "the Jesus Movement". Us. You and me. Witnesses to the power of undefeatable, undeniable, unceasing and transforming Love.

This is Love that faces the worst the world, and any Adversary of God can unleash. Love that dies and rises again. Love that heals. Love that rolls away stones and breaks down walls. Love that forgives. Love that will never die. Love that has, and will continue to change lives. Our lives – yours and mine. And it will change the lives of any and all whom we touch in Christ's name, offering that same love that raised Jesus, God's beloved Son from the dead.

Easter is about celebrating the power of this, God's love shown in Jesus' resurrection from the dead. "Easter is", as Presiding Bishop Michael Curry says, " the Ultimate Reality". And just like those first disciples – John, Peter, and Mary all had different ways of responding to this unexpected, confusing, troubling, and unbelievable reality of Jesus' resurrection, so it will be for us. There will be those like John, who believe and respond to God in faith easily. He sees the linen cloths lying there, and that is enough. We know people like this; the church needs them to survive.

These are the people who have no evidence to believe that the boy who messes up the sound equipment in the church will be anything but trouble, yet they insist he is headed toward a brilliant career in sound engineering! These are people who see service possibilities in faded fellowship halls and little plots of ground to plant a community garden. These are people who require no proof that eternal life trumps death and they smile inwardly every time they hear the word "resurrection". We draw strength from them for our own faith journeys, from their unwavering trust that God will work good, even out of a crucifixion.

Others of us may need more time, more convincing. We're just not sure. We may wonder if our skepticism, or reluctance, or some past behavior might block God's desire to love us and offer us new life. Like Peter our feelings are complicated and mixed. After all, Peter had run away from Jesus, and now he is running toward him? Some of us, like Peter, are secretly hoping for the outside chance that it really is true, and that we will get the opportunity for a "do over" and a fresh start.

And some will be like Mary, who did not at first know who Jesus was. She is caught unprepared because she expects nothing but death. She goes looking for the crucified, dead body of her dear friend, and instead is greeted by a living risen Lord. And she does recognize Jesus when he calls her by name. She would know **that** voice anywhere. The voice of the One who showed her compassion and healed her from demon possession. Gave her new life. It sometimes can be that difficult and yet that intimate and life-changing, learning to recognize God's healing presence in our lives and in the world. God's presence for us, with us. And when we do recognize it, we want to tell others what we have seen and heard. It's such good news that we cannot keep it to ourselves.

The invitation for each of us on this Easter Sunday is to pay attention, to look and listen for the new thing God is doing in the world, especially where suffering and death are present, where fear and disappointment and despair seem to reign. God is constantly working to bring forth love in many ways – through our relationships; through the beauty and mystery present in nature, and in art and music; through failure and

disappointment; through illness and health; through the church and its Word and Sacraments and prayer. It is too easy when we look around us, to think our world will never be more than a “Good Friday world”, because it seems like the world is “going to hell in a hand basket”, seems to be driven by so much that is not loving or redeeming, freeing or life-giving.

But not to worry, friends! We have at least the next 50 days of Easter – and actually as long as it takes us - to get used to the idea that God is **ALWAYS** about bringing new life and love. This is God’s desire and plan for the world, even as God bears with us in the midst of pain and suffering while that new life is being formed and revealed.

Joining up with “the Jesus movement” means sharing what we know of Jesus and then responding as Easter people. Easter people will not always understand, or display faith at every turn, but we do – now with living hope in a wounded and resurrected Lord – we do keep leaning forward toward new life and love. We lean forward, looking for and expecting to be part of that new life and undefeatable love God is even now bringing.

We’re here. We’re part of the Jesus movement, and we’re not going away. Listen - the living Lord is calling our name.

Alleluia! Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Amen.

**Note: The hymn sung during the sermon was “Lift your voice rejoicing Mary”, #190 from The Hymnal, 1982.*