

Easter 2023
[written in Oral form]

Easter, Year A
Matthew 28:1-10, John 20:17

April 9, 2023
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Jesus lived, died, and was resurrected.

These three declarations are essential parts of the kerygma.
Kerygma is a Greek New Testament word for the Christian proclamation.

We do not question Jesus living, but the resurrection is puzzling.

I understand resuscitation, resuming life.
Yet, I do Not understand the resurrection.
The resurrected body was identifiable, yet could walk through walls. It could be touched and Jesus ate food.
I do not understand how that could be.

However, I do not understand electricity either.
It flows through wires to power motors, and it flies through the air, and flashes around dried clothing. Weird.

The reality of electricity does not depend on my understanding it. The same is true with the resurrection.

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We also struggle with radical change, such as death, and this includes Jesus' death.

By the way,  
Seeing everyone here is so wonderful and profoundly touching.

Easter Sunday three years ago was very different.  
There were just a handful of people in the sanctuary.  
Chairs were pushed together. The piano side was cleared out for the soloist. Only participants were present.  
Ben was the soloist, not a song leader; was no one to lead.

The camera was on a step ladder about where the second row is. It was draped with a black cloth, and someone drew a smiley face on a piece of cardboard and attached it just below the camera.

That Easter was very strange. It was empty and felt heavy.  
Yet, that morning, I recall seeing daffodils blooming.  
All was not lost.

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Two thousand years ago, two Marys, laden with grief, slowly walked to the tomb of Jesus.

Women are leading the way. Women are the featured characters in the resurrection story.

This is noteworthy! This is significant. It's new!  
It is an intentional statement that standards must change.

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No doubt their spirits were low and their hearts heavy.
Their inspiration / their rabi and teacher / their friend had been ruthlessly killed.

Jesus the Son of God / the proclaimer of hope and redemption was killed.
Jesus, the healer for brokenness and despair was killed by the enraged crowd.
Jesus, the radical beckon for God was killed by the establishment.
Jesus, their dear friend was no more.

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Their sorrow was tortured with questions:  
HOW could that be? WHY?  
?????

Jesus had seen the writing on the wall.  
He had concluded that his presence / his message was a threat to those in control. The  
defenders of religion concluded Jesus was a threat that must be terminated.

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Their reaction is not surprising.
Yet, I image that God was disappointed and dismayed by the abandonment from Jesus'
followers.

With misinformation, those in power convinced the masses that old ways were better than
change. They turned on Jesus, and Jesus followers faded into silence.

Everything, the way of peace, grace, justice and love appeared to be defeated / destroyed.

Appeared so, if the Good News depended on only one person.

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This was another teachable moment.

Just as Jesus used the lame and blind for insightful lessons, God was doing the same.

With tremendous sadness, maybe even hesitation, God stepped back and let Jesus be  
murdered.

Perhaps, it was to show the consequences of lies / deception, and that the lust for power  
corrupts and destroys.

Maybe it was to demonstrate the difference between the living and dead.

Moreover, perhaps, God's ways are bigger than Jesus and are beyond the physical restraints of the human Jesus.  
Even Jesus taught that.

AND, maybe letting go is necessary for transformation / redemption.

The crucifixion was a frightful moment of separation and clarity.  
Jesus was killed.

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The two Marys approached the tomb. They saw soldiers guarding the sealed vault. At that moment, there was an earthquake. Likely an aftershock of Friday's quake.

As the ground trembled, an angel descended and rolled away the stone covering the entrance. The Marys witnessed this and saw the soldiers terrified and faint. The guards shook and became like dead men.

The tomb had been sealed closed. No one walked out of it when it was opened. It was already empty before it was opened.  
Jesus the dead became alive.  
And, the once living / the old guard became like the dead.

Agents of the divine, angels, heralded the birth of Jesus and now the resurrection.  
The angel called out to the women, "Do NOT be afraid."  
Your world has changed. It's okay; Do Not be afraid.  
The angel said, "I know you are looking for Jesus, but he is NOT here. Look see for yourself."

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*Looking for Jesus, but in the wrong place.
Looking for the divine, but in the wrong place.

Christ is NOT in the past / Not with the dead but with the new / with the living.

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The Angel continued, "Jesus has been raised. He is not in the tomb.  
Go quickly to tell the others. **You are the messengers.**  
For those afraid, grieving and powerless, tell them that Jesus has been raised from the dead. Tell them Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee, and there you will see him." Tell them the message: Christ lives and goes before you.

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The Resurrection transformed the mortal Jesus into the eternal Christ, an entity experienced, inspiring, and manifesting in the emerging church.

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The resurrection is also God's statement that evil, that greed, that selfish, powerful elite will NOT prevail.

The living are in God's domain.  
God does creation. God makes things new.

Love, grace, peace, and God's justice prevails.

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Sometimes, in dark times, we doubt this assurance.

Nevertheless, examine history, look around, the forces of evil and destruction have the finances, the resources, and all sorts of physical power, yet they do not prevail for long.

A few people committed to peace, love, God's justice, and grace are more powerful than any military.

The world is getting better. We truly are, and that is a miracle.

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Mary and Mary hurried off to tell the disciples, but they discovered Jesus was before them.

They recognized Jesus and bowed down to touch his feet.  
According to John, Mary Magdalene, wanted to hold onto Jesus.  
But Jesus stopped her saying, "Do NOT hold on to me because I have not ascended to be with God."

Do not hold on to me.  
There is no suggestion that this was a physical concern.  
Jesus was not a ghost.  
He was more in divine mode, and soon would be fully with God.

From death, circumstances had changed.  
Jesus was faithful. He taught and demonstrated God's way.  
His ministry was over, in the past.

She—WE—are not to hold onto Jesus / the past.  
It's all about God. And it is up to us to carry on the ministry.  
Our spiritual connection is with God.

With admiration and gratitude, we learn from the life of Jesus.  
Following his instructions leads us to God, to God's way.

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There is an obvious lesson in the Easter story.
The new can happen when we let go of the past.

Truth be told, we cannot hold onto what is gone / the past / what once was. It is futile, and destructive.

In a way, there is death in the transformation / in the new birth.

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40 years ago, I surrendered to God's call to go into fulltime ministry.

On that day, Oct 2, 1983, I wrote in my journal:  
"God called for my death, of sorts. A new life begins."

I quit my career, signed up to finish my undergraduate degree so I could go to seminary,....  
And my life was forever different.

A death was required.  
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To be sure, letting go is not easy. Change is difficult.
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Have you dropped off your child at university for the first time.  
They would soon start their first semester, and will not be home in the morning. They were an adult.  
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I did it twice, and both times I cried most of the way home.

You cannot hold on. Change is difficult.

You cannot hold onto to your child.  
You cannot hold onto your own youthfulness. We get old.  
You cannot hold onto the past, and any attempt to do so is destructive.  
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The world is changing. Our society is changing, and so is the church.

There are many with clenched teeth desperately trying to hold onto the past. And, that past was male dominated, racist, and misogynistic. They were NOT the good old days.

The anti-woke are like the leaders who crucified Christ.
They are the defenders of their power, and not what is right.
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Here's a thought:  
Maybe the LGBTQ+ community are the new messengers for the church or the BIPOC community?  
Just as women were 2,000 years ago, maybe God is using them to show us the way.  
Wouldn't that be something?  
God tends to choose the least powerful.

Maybe we could be adventuresome and listen, as we let go of our power?

Hey, we could demonstrate that we are Not afraid of a new way.

We could host a drag show in our church.  
Now, that would be fun....and different.  
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The resurrection of Jesus was full of surprises and newness.

The old way froze like the guards who appeared dead.

The searchers were given a message.

Go to Galilee and there you will find the divine.
Galilee was a safe place.

So, in way, the instructions were a bit like Psalm 23.

God is providing green pastures. It will be okay.
God is there waiting for us.

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We cannot hold on to the past.  
Change is difficult and frightening.  
Yes, yes.

We have to let go.  
And if we do not know what that means, then God will show us.  
Usually, it is not easy.

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In the quiet unknown,  
The Easter message rings out for those striving to live.

For those who are crushed,  
For those who are in dismay,  
For those in deep sorrow,  
For those feeling empty,  
For those who are searching,

The Easter message is full of hope for you.

The new is about to begin.

God is waiting and there you will find peace and a purpose.