

Easter Sunday – 2020

There was darkness over the earth before creation;
There is darkness in the womb before birth;
The seed grows in darkness before it meets the light;
There is darkness in the tomb before resurrection.
The dawn has come;
A new creation has commenced
and the world is born anew.

“Do not be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene,
who was crucified, he is not here.”

Christ is Risen! Jesus is alive! Alleluia! Jesus is Lord!

Prayer of Adoration.

Lord Jesus Christ, I greet you! Your hands still have holes in them, your feet are wet from the dew;
and with the memory of our names, undimmed by three days of death you meet me, risen from
the grave.

I fail to understand how; I puzzle at the reason why, but you have come: not to answer my
questions, but to show me your face. You are alive, and the world can rejoice again. *Hallelujah!*

I thank you for the beauty of this day. For the glorious message that all nature proclaims: The
Easter lilies with their waxen throats eloquently singing the good news; The birds impatient to
begin their song; every flowering tree, shrub and flaming bush. A living proclamation from you.
Open my heart that I may hear it too.

Lead me, I pray, to the grave that is empty; into the garden of the Resurrection where I may meet
you, my risen Lord. May I never again live as if you were dead.

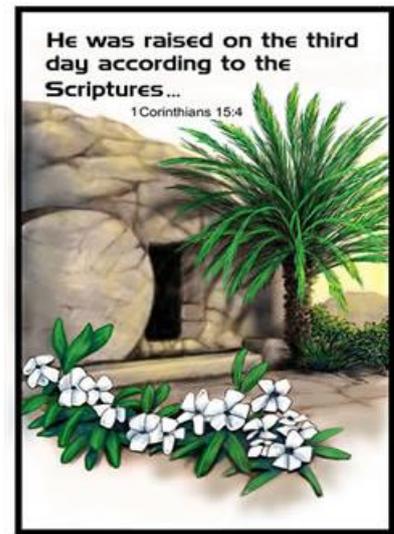
In your presence, restore my faith, my hope and my joy. Grant to my spirit refreshment, rest and
peace. Maintain within my heart an unruffled serenity that no storm of life shall ever be able to
take from me.

This is the day you have made, renew all my dearest desires, all my hopes and dreams, all my
chances to choose to live for the sake of you, my risen Lord Jesus Christ, though killed on a Cross,
alive now for ever.

This is the day, and this is the time, and so I worship you, rejoicing and giving thanks that this day
and all my days are lived in the light of that hope. Amen.

It Seemed Too Good To Be True – A Meditation Reflection Based On - Luke 24:1-12

It seemed too good to be true, too wonderful even to contemplate he might be alive again - so we
shook our heads, raised our eyebrows, and laughed between our tears.



We wanted to believe it, of course we did, more than anything else in the world, but how could we after all we'd seen, everything we'd been through?

Oh, it's all right for you - anyone can be wise after the event - but put yourself in our shoes; imagine what it must have been like having seen Jesus die as we did, and then ask yourself honestly: would you have felt any different?

Our faith was in tatters, life seeming an empty void, for how could God have let it happen, how could he have allowed a man like that to endure such a terrible end?

Yet he had, and we just couldn't get that knowledge out of our minds.

It had been different when Jesus was with us - we'd looked forward then, confident, full of hope, no promise too wonderful, no vision beyond fulfilment; for in those few short years of his ministry he'd shown us another way - the way of love, goodness, mercy - and we'd actually believed such things could finally triumph over evil, no matter how impossible it seemed.

Not any more, though.

It was back to the cold harsh world of reality where hopes are dashed and dreams lie broken, where goodness is trampled underfoot and love tossed back in your face, and this time we were resolved to keep our feet firmly on the ground, the thought of another disappointment, another let-down, too much to bear.

And yet, despite it all, I had to be sure, that flicker of hope their words had kindled either fanned into life or laid to rest once and for all; so I ran to the tomb, scarcely knowing what I did, and found the stone rolled away just as they had said, the grave clothes cast aside, the tomb, empty!

Can it really be, our Lord risen, alive?

I want to believe it so much, more than you'll ever know, but dare I take a risk of faith again?

What do you think – is it too good to be true?

The Gospel of John 20:1-18 (New International Version)

The Empty Tomb

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who

had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

And then the Gospel of Mark 16:1-8 (New International Version)

Jesus Has Risen

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Bearer of News

If you have nearly lost someone near and dear to you, you will find the Gospel readings today within your experience. In wartime, families hoped to avoid and yet expect that knock on the door: standing there, a uniformed and grim-looking person who had come to announce that a loved one, a young person is missing in action or dead.

Then there have been those who have sat in one of those ambitiously cheerful waiting rooms, expecting a surgeon to appear to tell them the worst or perhaps the best news. Time seems to stand still. Hope comes and hope goes. Perhaps we pray or tell God off or both. Companions try to comfort one, awkwardly. There's always one who is brave enough or foolish enough to assure us all will be well. We'd like to believe them, as they look on the bright side of the moment.

Then, when one hears that the young soldier is alive, or has been found and is safe – all is well and one gives thanks God. We affirm our belief in miracles. When our loved one is safely in recovery ward, we think of the one who was some bravely looking on the bright side.

Now friends, please don't believe for a moment that the disciples were so faith-filled on Easter morning that they expected to meet the Risen Jesus. First-century Jews were no more used to people emerging to life after death than we are. Many of them believed that at some future time the righteous would rise and inherit a new earth. Many didn't really believe in life after death, let alone dead people coming to life. They went through life with no hope of a future life. Yet they worshipped God, perhaps hoping for a better deal now, or on the off chance, that God had something great in store for them.

The Gospel records are quite clear that the disciples had no idea what Jesus was talking about when he said he would rise again.

The two Gospel choices for this Easter day, come from St. John's gospel and from St. Mark's, and both tell the same story, but in different ways.

John concentrates on Mary Magdalene. She loved Jesus so much, that she was utterly downcast, grief stricken, crying her eyes out as she stumbled into the tomb and found it empty. She had seen Jesus die, yes really die, cruelly, on the Cross. She came to be close to him just as some of us have wanted a last look at a loved one in the funeral parlour. Even that is taken from her. Mary Magdalene turns and senses someone close, probably a gardener up early in the dawning of the day. "Where have they taken him? She asks. "Where have they put him?" she blurts out. She is sure that the religious leaders have removed Jesus body so that his tomb won't become a site of pilgrimage.

It is only when the "gardener" says her name, "Mary," that she knows it is the Lord, it is Jesus. When someone who loves you speaks your name, there is something special, something wonderful about the way it sounds.

Jesus tells Mary not to cling to him, but rather to go and tell his followers that he is alive.

In Mark's Gospel, in his usual hurried style, he records how a group of disciples go to the tomb. They find it is empty. A young man tells them to go and tell the other disciples that Jesus is alive. They run back, but then say nothing.

Perhaps Mary does tell the waiting group of friends what she has experienced. Perhaps it is Peter the new leader and John the Beloved, who speak with authority and love. We don't know.

What we do find in that in both the Gospels accounts from John and Mark, there's something important for us to grasp about Easter. Jesus warns Mary not to hang on to him but to tell the good news. So much of our religion or faith is about us. We want Jesus to live in order that he may give us what we want, or keep us safe, or heal us, in this life, even if we believe in an afterlife, our belief is vague. We are rather like the people in Jesus' day who go through the actions of religion with some hope of being rewarded now.

Jesus says to Mary to go and "tell" that something extraordinary has happened, that he, Jesus is Risen. Jesus tells Mary that he has not completed the action yet, the Resurrection is not primarily about eternal life, for the Ascension completes that part of the whole. The Resurrection is about new life, a new world, a new country. This new country isn't geographical. It is made up of the dead, the living, and those who are not yet born, who in their lives "tell" that Jesus lives, and work to lay the foundations of a new heaven and a new earth.

Mark tells us that the disciples ran from the empty tomb and didn't say a thing! Perhaps they are as embarrassed as we are to blurt out our faith that "*Christ has died, Christ is Risen, Christ will come again*" the great Easter day proclamation. So we talk about justice, good works, piety and the outward things of religion. We become experts on how the service should be taken or how the parish spends its money, but we say nothing at all about the crux and core of Christianity, that Jesus Christ is Risen.

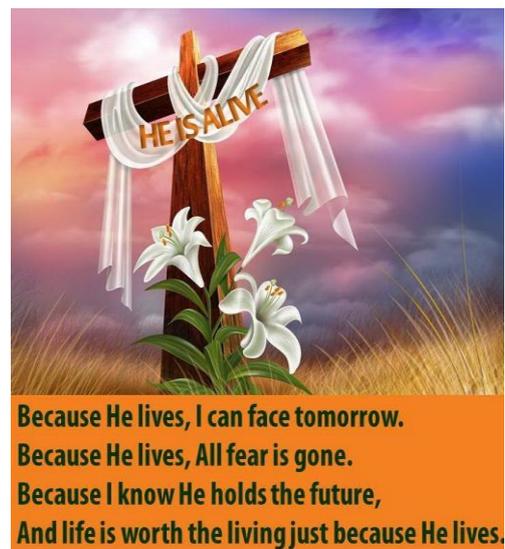
All the religious things we involve ourselves in, justice, mercy, worship and parish affairs are good in themselves, but without the presence of the Risen Christ at the heart of what we believe, we are, as St. Paul say, "of all people the most miserable." (1 Corinthians 15:19 – KJV)

For the good news of today is Christ is Risen! So be glad, wipe away your tears and now go tell the Good News.

I know that my Redeemer lives, glory, hallelujah!
What joy and peace this sentence gives, glory, hallelujah!
Shout on, pray on, we're gaining ground, glory, hallelujah!
The dead's alive and the lost is found, glory, hallelujah!

He lives, to bless me with his love, glory, hallelujah!
He lives, to plead for me above, glory, hallelujah!
He lives, my hungry soul to feed, glory, hallelujah!
He lives to help in time of need, glory, hallelujah!

He lives, all glory to his name, glory, hallelujah!
He lives, my Saviour, still the same, glory, hallelujah!
What joy the blest assurance gives, glory, hallelujah!
I know that my Redeemer lives, glory, hallelujah!



By Samuel Medley (1738-1799) to LM and alleluias tune. (Church Hymnary 4 – No 423)

Prayer:

Sovereign God, rekindle my faith through the message of Easter. Remind me of all you have done and all you are yet able to do. Assure me, through experiencing again the presence of the risen Christ in my heart, that with you nothing is too good to be true, for you are able to do more than I could ever ask for or imagine.

Lord Jesus Christ, you speak your word to me as you spoke it to the Apostles long ago: "Come, follow me." You call me as you have called so many over the years: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

You offer me, as you offer all your people, refreshment for my soul: "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink." Lord, I thank you for that invitation, and gladly I respond, but, more than that, I thank you for the fact that before anyone comes to you, you come first to them.

You came to Peter, James and John by the lakeside; to the hungry, the sick and the outcasts in the streets of Galilee; to Mary Magdalene weeping in the garden; to two weary disciples walking the Emmaus road; to the Apostles trembling behind locked doors; to Saul breathing murder on the road to Damascus; and so to countless others since. Always it is you who makes the first approach, calling your people to faith, and still you come through your Spirit to meet with me.

Open my eyes to your presence and lead me forward in your service until that day when, with all your people, I enter your kingdom and meet with you face to face. If you ever discover me utterly cast down and giving way to despair, take hold of me and remind me of the Easter experience that is for every age and for every person.

Once again on this holy day you have reminded me Jesus, are risen and so rejoicing that you are with me this Easter-day, make me ready now to follow you, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, the great Resurrection, so that I would be one of your people in the world, through your power risen Christ who taught us to pray, I now say;

Our Father ... Amen.

Blessing:

Go and tell the good news: Christ has risen!
Death has lost its power.
To God belongs the victory.
Alleluia!

Arise and go, as one who has seen the Lord.

With the blessing of God Almighty, the Father,
the Son and the Holy Spirit, being upon you,
and remaining with you this Easter and forever.

AMEN.

