

Easter Day  
I Corinthians 15:1-11, John 20:1-18  
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April 1, 2018

### Finding Hope and Joy and Love

*Alleluia, Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen Indeed. Alleluia.* What glorious words: words of hope and joy and love. A new beginning!

Our reading from Paul's letter to the Corinthians summarizes the good news we celebrate today: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day. Paul tells us that Christ appeared not just to one or two after his resurrection, but to many, and the good news spread. This is the essence of the resurrection, something that we as believers can hold onto. Paul wants to insure that we recognize that the Resurrection is something completely new — a single, definitive, and unique action of God to redeem the world, taking place in one particular moment in history.

Christ's resurrection is remarkable, to some unbelievable, and certainly to all, a mystery beyond our human capability to truly comprehend. But without it, we wouldn't be gathering in churches around the world talking about Jesus. Think about it . . . we don't remember, much less worship, any of the other tens of thousands of people who were crucified by the Romans thousands of years ago . . . which was exactly what Rome had in mind. Crucifixion was a slow, torturous, dehumanizing public death meant to completely obliterate a person while also crushing the spirit of any who supported them. So there is something new, something amazingly unique about THIS story, for out of the suffering and death of Jesus on Good Friday, we awaken today to the empty tomb, to Easter, for Easter is where we find hope and joy and love, as we hold onto, in faith, that truth of the Risen Christ.

Where do we find hope? We hear in John's gospel that Mary Magdalene arrives at Jesus' tomb and notices that something has changed. The stone covering the tomb has been taken away, so she runs to tell Peter and the beloved disciple that Jesus' body is gone and then they race back to the tomb.

I wonder, why do they run? Could it be that in spite of all they've experienced in the prior few days, all they've seen, that's there still a spark of hope remaining inside them? Could they be have been longing and praying, that — with God's help and the power of the Spirit — there be might just be more to the life story of Jesus of Galilee than death on a cross; other possibilities through the power and mercy of God? For yes, Easter is about finding hope in the hopeless places.

John's gospel also tells us about finding joy where there is only death and sorrow. While Mary is at the tomb, weeping in at the finality of death, despairing that Jesus' body is gone, she doesn't immediately recognize the presence of the Risen Jesus. But her tears turn to shouts of joy, as she hears Jesus calling her name and she answers, "Rabbouni!" Mary's eyes are opened and she can now see her beloved teacher and Lord, and she's filled with joy. Yes, Easter is also about our sorrow being transformed into Resurrection Joy.

But what I find most meaningful — a even greater blessing than either hope or joy — is discovering in Easter the overwhelming gift of God’s love. The kind of magnanimous and overflowing love that has existed in God for all time. For Christ Jesus, the One who was and is and is to come, the One who humbled himself to walk among us, who suffered and died for us, the One who gloriously rose again, shows us what it means to live a whole life governed by love. And the truth of this love is what transforms a small group of men and women in Jesus’ day to begin, through the power of the Spirit, to change the course of human history throughout the world.

Jesus shows us what it means to ground ourselves, our very souls and bodies, in love – to live our lives loving God and loving neighbor. Jesus would not accept the rules of the world, would not reject, debase, or ignore those seen as other, but instead he loved them, healed them, and compassionately cared for them. When the powerful came after Jesus, he refused to meet violence with violence. When those closest to him betrayed and abandoned him, he forgave them. Out of love for all of humankind, Jesus sacrificed himself for all the world.

And God’s love overcame it all: the violent economic, religious, and political powers of the day; humanity’s self-centeredness and sinfulness. Nothing could overcome God’s love for God’s creation, a love stronger than even death. Christ’s love overcame the worldly powers of greed and injustice, for God’s love is more powerful than all the kingdoms of this world. God’s love brought Christ Jesus out of the tomb.

Today, we live in our own troubled times, within a world that encourages us to turn away and ignore the oppressed, the needy, and those identified as “other,” by whatever rationale society currently uses to determine who is “less than.” There’s an ever increasing cultural noise, pushing us to decide who’s in and who’s out or loudly demands that we pick one side versus another, as if life is that simple.

This week, on Wednesday, we mark the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. — a reminder that although there has been some progress, how far we still have yet to go to truly live into loving all God’s children as ourselves. How much has actually changed in how we act towards one another today, versus 50 years ago, or 200 years ago, or 2000 years ago? Where do we turn, in our own time, to find hope and joy and love?

The Resurrection Christ shows us the way, shows us the way of truth and life, for where there’s death and despair, Easter happens, showing us God’s way of love.

Listen closely to what Jesus says to Mary: “Go to my brothers and sisters. Go to them and say, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” These words are so important to our understanding of what the resurrection means for us all, for they refer back to Jesus’ mission in the world, to God’s purpose.

Jesus came into this world so that all who received him — all who believed in him — would have the power to become children of God. We’re offered a new relationship with God through the Risen Christ, a relationship that leads us to see one another as brothers and sisters, each made in God’s own image, and this deeply intimate, loving relationship, proclaimed to all the world on Easter Day, is all about love.

We too are invited to hear God calling each of us by name and are invited to respond to God’s love the same way that Mary does: with more love. For Mary answers Jesus’ call to be an

apostle, and becomes an apostle to the apostles, as she tells her brothers and sisters that God's great love has defeated even death itself. She proclaims the good news: that through the Risen Christ, we have all been adopted into God's great love, and accepted as God's beloved children. All of us.

And our call, as God's beloved, is not simply to cling to Jesus within these walls, for if we truly encounter God's love in the Risen Christ, our response must be to share God's love with ALL we encounter out there, in the world, both in word and deed. The love that shows us the truth of the Risen Lord is the same love that sends us out through those doors, to love our neighbors as ourselves, and together, to strive for God's justice and peace.

So go out and spread the good news! Alleluia! Christ is risen!