

“A New Creation”  
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St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky  
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John 20:1-18

I think it’s important to render credit where credit is due, because so many people tried hard to get the job done right. Judas’ insider-information on where Jesus would be that night, the well-choreographed trial by the priests, the public pressure put on Pilate to hand Jesus over. The Roman soldiers, true professionals, had plenty of practice crucifying people. If it weren’t so evil, you could almost admire the cleverness and efficiency. But despite everyone’s best efforts, it didn’t work, at least not for long, because when you’re going up against the God of all creation, good luck.

This is the God who it made it all and keeps it all existing. As the very first chapter of Genesis reveals, everything exists because God said so, literally. “Let there be,” and whatever God said just happened. And this wasn’t a one-off that happened in a spasm of six solar days, but over the course of billions of years God has kept creating time and stars and tiny grains of sands. Even now, God is singing your name, just because He loves you, because He enjoys you, and if God stopped singing our names for a fraction of a nanosecond, we wouldn’t die. We’d disappear.

To create order from chaos, light from darkness, beauty from nothingness. **That** is real power. **That** is glory. Think you can shut that down with a cross? Think again. Now the cross was beyond awful, and Jesus has earned our everlasting thanks for the sacrifice of suffering he offered there. But the people who nailed Jesus down actually lifted him up. What they thought would be permanent was only temporary, and far from a setback, they ironically and unwittingly

helped God emerge victorious over death, breathe new life into creation, and bring hope for the restoration and redemption and reconciliation of all creatures, including us.

Yet when dawn broke on the third day, the people who worked so hard to kill Jesus probably woke up feeling pretty good. Across town, though, for the disciples the past few days had been the worst of their lives. Neither group seems to have known that the man who died was also very same divine Word who said “Let there be,” who sings the name of every living creature. So Mary Magdalene set out before dawn to mourn at the tomb in the garden.

Imagine how horrific it was for her to find the stone set aside. Who could have done this, and why? Grave robbers? Someone who didn’t think death was enough, but felt the need to steal Jesus’ body and desecrate it. Who knows what was running through her mind as she rushed back to the disciples? Breathless, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.”

That sent two of the disciples running, Peter and the other one whose name we don’t know. They were hoping that Mary had made some sort of mistake, maybe gotten confused in the dim light and gone to the wrong place, but their worst fears were confirmed when they leaned inside the tomb and saw only the linens that had been wrapped around Jesus’ corpse. The body itself was gone. So they left. What else could they possibly do? But Mary Magdalene stayed. She wasn’t ready to go.

As she wept, Mary took another look, and inside she saw two angels seated on the shelf where Jesus’ body had lain. “Woman, why are you weeping?” they asked, and we can imagine her choked voice, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do know where they have laid him.” I confess that the angels disappoint me a little. The word angel means “messenger,” and they could have said, “He’s alive. Don’t you remember what he told you?” But they said nothing, no

words of comfort or hope, no grand revelation that Christ had risen. So Mary turned away and saw a man she mistook for the gardener, who asked the same question as the angels, plus one more “Whom are you looking for?”

Suspecting that maybe he had something to do with it, that he might be one of the “they” she blamed for taking Jesus away, she pleaded. She begged, “Tell me where he is. I’ll do anything. This man meant everything to me. He changed my life. He saved me,” and then Jesus called her by name, and her eyes, blurred by tears, saw her Savior. Jesus had returned in glory, so transformed that Mary couldn’t recognize him until she heard his voice calling her name. Can you imagine the shock, the ecstasy, the sheer joy of that moment? Jesus had not been desecrated, but liberated from the grave, from the power of death.

All she wanted to do was embrace him and never let go, but Jesus told her, “Do not hold on to me, but go.” Go. There was a message to deliver, and nothing was going to keep Mary quiet. The tomb was open and empty, unleashing the divine Word of life, a new creation full of possibilities. The oracle God spoke through the prophet Isaiah had been fulfilled in a way that nobody’d ever thought. “I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice.” So that first witness to the Resurrection, the one who waited at the tomb after the others had gone home, ran with an energy she’d never felt before, heart bursting to share.

And for the moment, that’s where the story leaves us. To hear further installments, come back on subsequent Sundays. Now it might be hard to summon up the excitement Mary felt. Hers was a unique experience. Most of us grew up with this story, and most of us who didn’t still know it pretty well. Every year we gather in celebration and praise of the most wondrous

event in the history of the universe. And that's why we worship, to try to re-live these holy moments, and allow them to enter our hearts and minds anew, because we need to.

Sometimes, we feel powerless and afraid, exploited and abused, broken and shattered, crying out for help, for relief, for rescue, and we are far from alone. We can feel like the disciples after the crucifixion, frustrated and disappointed. We can feel abandoned by God with no hope or clear sense of purpose, and so many others feel the same way.

Resurrection power rarely fixes any of that in the blink of an eye, because the greatest pains in life can't be healed with a simple fix, and the resurrection is so much more than a mere fix. It is the inauguration of a new reality in which evil's days are numbered, and the faster we run to spread the good news, the faster evil's days count down. If Jesus can defeat death itself, evil doesn't stand a chance.

We who know the story need to share it, without shame. The Word of life sings our names, every name, endlessly. We need to sing the praises of Jesus without ceasing. Beyond words, powerful as they can be, there is a witness to be offered in the priorities we set and how we treat people with kindness and conduct our lives with dignity and integrity. But perhaps most of all there is a singular lightness of being, a peace which comes when the Resurrection lives in us.

What it would mean, what would it look or feel like, for that lightness of being to be expressed in you? Figuring that out takes some work, and a good place to start is to ask yourself, "Whom are you looking for, and where are you looking?" because Jesus can pop up where we least expect him to be, in the refugee and the homeless, in fractured relationships, and even in a proud person desperately trying to hide their insecurities.

When we can accept that the gardener just might be Jesus, or we offer grace and the mercy of forgiveness to the person we like the least or who hurt us the most, we proclaim the Risen Christ, and every time we do, the opportunity arises that the peace we so desire, the peace that comes with the presence of Jesus, can be released, both for us and for others.

You don't need me to tell you how the world can be: silly, superficial, mean. And at the moment, incredibly bizarre and uncertain and scary. We need to remember that there's much excellence in our world, but every day we also live with lies and cruelty, sin of every kind, bringing misery. The world needs hope, the prospect of joy, in troubled times like these. People need to see and hear and know that Christ is Risen, transformed by glory, singing their name with love, and people need to know that nothing can take away the Lord, not anymore; nothing can nail him down again; nothing can stuff him in a dark empty hole, not anymore. Amen.