

## **HE IS ALIVE!**



**Scripture:**

**Isaiah 25:6-9**

<sup>6</sup>On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. <sup>7</sup>And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; <sup>8</sup>he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. <sup>9</sup>It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

**John 20:1-18**

<sup>1</sup>Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. <sup>2</sup>So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.’ <sup>3</sup>Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. <sup>4</sup>The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup>He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup>Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup>and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup>Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup>for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup>Then the disciples returned to their homes.

<sup>11</sup>But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; <sup>12</sup>and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. <sup>13</sup>They said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.’ <sup>14</sup>When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

<sup>15</sup>Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?’ Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.’ <sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rabbouni!’ (which means Teacher).

<sup>17</sup>Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”’ <sup>18</sup>Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her.”

**This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!**  
**HE IS ALIVE!**

In 1930, Albert Einstein wrote an essay entitled  
“What I Believe.”

**He said, "To sense that behind everything that can be experienced there is something that our minds cannot grasp, whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly: this is religiousness. In this sense ... I am a devoutly religious man."**

I think you might agree that the concept of the resurrection is something that our minds have trouble grasping. We understand it only indirectly until the time comes when we experience it ourselves. That will be an awesome day, won't it? God works in mysterious ways they say.

### **THE FIRST GOOD NEWS SERMON WAS PREACHED BY A WOMAN**

Another mystery is this: Why did God grant the power of preaching the Gospel to a woman first? Isn't it shocking to see from this passage that the first sermon message about the Good News ever preached after Christ's death was preached by a woman!?

Reverend Dr. Richard Cromie in his book, *Sometime Before the Dawn: Responses to the Resurrection*, said, "(Upon seeing Jesus alive), Mary was so excited that she ran back to the disciples and delivered the first Easter sermon: the preacher was Mary and the congregation was the disciples and some others.... And the sermon was delightfully short."

Being given the role as the first preacher of the gospel was clearly quite shocking to Mary Magdalene, too! My New Testament class at Princeton seminary made a big deal about this event. The fact that Christ chose Mary Magdalene to spread the news of his rising showed that Christ still had a compassionate liberating character even in his transformed resurrected condition. This event also showed how Jesus believed that even women were capable of taking the Good News that he was alive to the rest of the disciples and thus the world. Jesus continued to break down barriers even in his last hours on earth. He was the liberator and patriarchal code breaker who challenged the oppressive traditions of the Roman culture by treating women equally with men in many circumstances such as:

- when he spoke to the woman at the well,

- when he released the woman caught in adultery,
- when he healed the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years.

All of these acts show his compassion and sense of equality for women. He continues to advocate justice for women by appointing a woman to be the preacher and teacher about his resurrection. In that era, these acts deeply challenged Ancient Israel's laws and customs.

This passage in John says Jesus instructed Mary directly to give the message of what we now describe as "the Good News." In the book of Matthew, it is an angel first who says to her, "Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.'" This is my message for you."<sup>8</sup> So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.<sup>9</sup> Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.<sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

### **WHAT IS THIS GOOD NEWS?**

Preaching and teaching and showing the Good News of God's love with our lives is what being a disciple of Jesus is all about.

Now what exactly is this Good News as it relates to our Easter celebration today? The Good News, translated in Greek becomes the word "gospel." When we say we are preaching the message of the gospel, we are preaching the news of Christ's death and resurrection and what it means to have faith in Jesus who gave up his body on a cross out of love.

Christ's coming to earth and being raised from the dead fulfilled what Isaiah predicted as Linda read today: "He will swallow up death for ever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken."

Yet, the idea of the resurrection is still not easy to conceptualize. It helps me when I examine how other theologians explained it. Apostle Paul believed that the resurrection was not meant to be a full body resurrection like Lazarus' whom Jesus raised from the dead. We will not become like Zombies! Thank goodness!

Remember in this gospel of John, Mary didn't recognize Jesus until he spoke her name. And Jesus told Mary not to touch him because his transformed resurrected body was different from his earthly body. Paul believed that the newly resurrected body would be a heavenly body, immortal, glorified, powerful and pneumatic (spirit-like) in contrast to an earthly body, which is physically mortal and weak.

When Mary preached the Good News, the main message was: Christ is alive and resurrected and you will see him again. Yet, their reaction to her message was disbelief. They just couldn't believe it was possible even though Jesus told his disciples many times before his crucifixion to expect him to rise again.

### **DO WE BELIEVE IT?**

Do you believe it when we say today, He is Risen, He is Alive, He is Risen indeed?

It is okay to admit you do not know. It is okay to still be figuring it out. Those who take faith seriously ponder these things carefully in their hearts.

**I choose to believe in the resurrection because it makes sense to me that if God wants all of creation to understand the depth of love our Parent God has for us, we need to see it in action. Jesus humbled himself, served, healed, and suffered as we suffer. He wept with those who wept, danced at weddings, sweated blood, and showed us how to advocate for the vulnerable and the oppressed out of deep unconditional love for each one of us.**

Acts 3 explains the role of Jesus: "For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.'"

### **REAL LOVE**

Left on our own without a good sense of what love really feels like, we humans can get pretty

wicked in our ways. God's love is essential for healthy development of the body, mind, and spirit. (Notre Dame Research.)

Those of you who have been watching the Boston Marathon bomber trial, do you ever wonder if Dzhokhar Tsarnaev had anyone in his life to show him what real love looks and feels like? His defense attorneys want us to believe that he was brain washed by his brother and participated in the Boston marathon bombing only because his brother commanded him to. It seems doubtful that his brother Tamerlan loved him or else he would not have put his brother's life at risk. And then last week the police testimony showed that purposely ran over his brother in a getaway SUV! Horrifying! Where did the evil that possessed them originate? Did they ever get the chance, in the past, to learn about God's love?

I wonder if the Tsarnaev brothers had been given different childhoods, where they had truly experienced God's sacrificial love as children, would they still have committed such evil? Could they have murdered innocent children if they were taught that God sent his son to heal and teach and preach love for our neighbors? I don't think so.

But Christ showed us from the cross that we are to find a way to love our enemies, even the psychologically damaged murderers like the Tsarnaev brothers. "Father, forgive them, for they knew not what they were doing." We can be forgiving people while still providing justice for the victims and preventing Dzhokhar from ever being able to hurt others again. Justice and love can prevail in the midst of tragedies. To be able to forgive people like this takes powerful love in our souls.

### **EXTREMELY POWERFUL LOVE**

My favorite Jesuit theologian and paleontologist, Teilhard de Chardin, believed that Christ's resurrection was made possible only by extremely powerful love. He analyzed the way Christ's body went through a process he called "complexification," that the power of love allowed Jesus "to cross the boundary of death and create unity where death divides."

Teilhard believed that once Christ crossed that boundary of death for us, we are able to participate in Christ's resurrection from that point on.

Reflecting back on this past Holy week, it was a week for Jesus to accomplish his final acts of Love.

We commemorated Christ washing his disciples' feet and then telling them to do likewise for others after he shared a last supper with them. Yesterday, at the Good Friday service, we remembered how he prayed for his disciples in the garden of Gethsemane and showed his obedience and love of God when he prayed, "Not my will but thine be done." Then at his arrest he showed love for his oppressors by healing the guard's ear that Peter slashed. But the ultimate sign of love for his oppressors was from the cross when he forgave them for they did not know what they were doing.

Still Christ continued to show the love he had for his mother and for the disciple John by putting his mother's care in his hands. And Jesus even showed us how to love strangers by reassuring the robber on the cross beside him that he could join him in paradise! The significance of these teachings about how to show love in all circumstances is huge! There is so much to learn from analyzing each one. But I won't do that today.

#### **EASTER – THE LOVE IN ACTION HOLIDAY**

After pondering all of these acts of love leading up to today, I have come up with a new advertising campaign for Easter. Easter is the "Love in Action Holiday!" Christmas is the "Love is Born" holiday and Easter is the sacrificial Love in Action holiday!

The resurrection was an act of love. Theologian and author Parker Palmer says, "Every religious tradition is rooted in mysteries, including claims about what happens after we die. But this I know for sure: he said, as long as we're alive, choosing resurrection is always worth the risk."

And Pastor Josh McDowell expands this thought by saying, "No matter how devastating our struggles, disappointments, and troubles are, they are only temporary. No matter what happens to you, no matter the depth of tragedy or pain you face, no matter how death stalks you and your loved ones, the resurrection promises you a future of immeasurable good."

But in the meantime, before we die, New Testament professor N.T. Wright emphasizes the worthiness of living lives of service to others in anticipation of the resurrection. He says, "The point of the resurrection ... is that the present bodily life is not valueless just because it will die. ... What you do with your body in the present matters. What you do in the present, by preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building chicken coops and

schools in Haiti, digging wells, campaigning for justice, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself, will all last into God's future."

I began with Albert Einstein so I will close with him. When it comes to our understanding of God's plan for us and the resurrection, I prefer to see it all as a miracle waiting to happen.

**Dr. Einstein said,  
"There are two ways to live.  
You can live your life as if nothing  
is a miracle or you can live  
as if everything is a miracle."**

I prefer to choose as Mary Magdalene chose, that everything is a miracle – including the Good News of the resurrection! Let's see how Reverend Dr. Rob Bell applies his understanding of Christ's resurrection to our lives today. (A Rob Bell video was shown to the congregation.)

**Spread the word! Christ is Risen!  
He is Risen indeed!**

**Benediction: (from Ann Weems)**

**I pray we will have the ears to hear and believe the Good News and the courage to preach it, the eyes to see who Jesus really is, and the love to follow.**

**To feed his sheep, to live in peace with one another, standing up and taking risks for his Word.**

**And truly believing that God's arms are open to us all in mercy, forgiveness, and unending love.**

**And may the grace of our Lord, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore. Amen**



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