

Easter’s aftershocks continue to shake us up; tremors of resurrection reverberate still; they stir us when death casts its dark shadow over us; they stir us when injustice and tyranny proclaim their supremacy; they stir us when we wonder if living in hope is a fool’s errand.

In those moments, we join Mary and the other Mary outside the tomb. Seemingly impossible obstacles loom in our way. Forces beyond our control stand guard. We are tempted, so tempted, to surrender to despair but within us, a flicker of Easter light still burns, still lights the way. We cling to the Easter message like Mary clinging to Jesus’ feet, *Matthew 28:5-6 (NRSV) The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.”*<sup>1</sup>

The Easter message begins with an event – God raising Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, a particular man in a particular place at a particular time who died a particular death. Many attempts have been made to explain away this event; Jesus didn’t really die on the cross; he passed out and was revived, or someone else died in his place; or perhaps he did die, and the disciples or someone else stole the body, and all this talk of angels and earthquakes is just myth and legend, it’s just a good story to stir folks up.

Many attempts have been made, and they all boil down to this: Does God continue to act within human history, or not? If God doesn’t, then we are all just whistling in the dark. We’re on our own. If God does act within human history, then resurrection is possible, new life, new beginnings, new hope, anything is possible, because God raised Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified from death to new life.

The fact that we are here this morning suggests that either we believe this wholeheartedly, or we believe this with some reservations, or we at least show the belief in our family members some respect for their sake. While “proving” or “disproving” the resurrection is interesting and for some of us even inspirational, my focus this morning is on the message of Easter. What is God saying to us today? What difference does it make to believe that Jesus Christ is risen today?

✦ JESUS CHRIST

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

We say the name so easily – “Jesus Christ.” Hopefully we say it reverently, respectfully; sometimes the name is said as a curse, but we say the name “Jesus Christ” and in saying this name we are saying that Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, is the Christ, which means, “the Anointed One,” “the Messiah,” “the one through whom God is saving God’s people and reigning in this world.”

God gave Jesus that name on Easter. God gave that name to the crucified one. Easter is God’s answer to Good Friday.

Our lives have so many Good Fridays. We carry so many crosses; crosses that come in the form of a diagnosis; crosses that come when hope meets with disappointment, when trust discovers betrayal, when love encounters loss, when life ends in death. We carry so many crosses. We endure so many Good Fridays.

Good Friday sends a message. That’s why the Romans killed Jesus. That’s why the priests wanted the Romans to not just kill Jesus but to crucify him. They wanted to send the message of Good Friday; “This man is nothing. Forget about him. Forget what he taught you about love and forgiveness. Forget his promise of a new world.”

Our lives have so many Good Fridays. We hear these messages over and over again, “You are nothing. No one knows you. No one cares about you. You are getting what you deserve. It is what it is, same as it ever was.”

On Easter, God shook the world with God’s reply to Good Friday; Good Friday then, Good Fridays now: “Rejoice! Death does not have the last word! Put your faith in this crucified man. Spend your life following this crucified man. Carry your cross with this crucified man. He’s more than a man. He’s my Son, Jesus Christ. I have spoken, and Easter is my message!”

◆ RISEN TODAY

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“I told you so” is not the most dignified statement, but if we were in charge of publicizing the resurrection that’s what we’d have Jesus say. We’d have Jesus appear in the temple courts in front of Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin, and a huge Passover throng and say, “I told you so.” Then, we’re off to the Antonia, the Roman fort conveniently overlooking the temple where Pilate and his soldiers are holed up: “I told you so.” We’d have lots of witnesses, important witnesses, witnesses who would immediately make the message of Easter credible.

Instead, according to Matthew, Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” (whoever she is). They are a publicist’s nightmare. First, women have no credibility and legal standing in the first century. They cannot be witnesses. To

make matters worse, Mary Magdalene has a checkered past to say the least. She wouldn't be a credible witness today. Furthermore, they don't actually witness the resurrection. In the half-light just before dawn, they see an empty tomb and meet Jesus on the way out of the cemetery. He tells them: *Matthew 28:10 (NRSV)* **“Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”**<sup>2</sup>

It's a long way from Jerusalem to Galilee. A story can come together when a group is walking 96.53 miles (155.3 kilometers for you metric fans). That's not the way we'd tell this story. That's not the way to get the message out, but it is precisely the way God is working in this world and in our lives. We worship a crucified God who seeks the least and the lost. We worship a crucified God who embraces our shame and our pain. We worship a crucified God who answers every Good Friday with the Easter message: “Do not be afraid. I know you. I love you. I'm not angry with you. You are not a stranger to me; you are my family – my brother, my sister, my friend.”

“Jesus Christ is risen today.” The Easter message first proclaimed to the women then by the women is God's message for us today. Easter faith isn't just a matter of believing that a dead body came back to life. The soldiers and the priests believed this as well, and were quick to work against the resurrection. Easter faith is knowing that this event heals the relationship between you and God [no matter what you've done] .... Easter means you have another chance to be the person God created you to be, and you can start doing that at any moment, even after you think it's too late. *Matthew 28:10 (NRSV)* **“Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”**<sup>3</sup> It's a long way from Jerusalem to Galilee, and 96.53 miles later, the disciples whom Jesus called "brothers" and "sisters" learned that it was never too late.

Jesus Christ is risen today! Today we believe. Today we believe in the resurrection by believing in the possibilities for redemption and reconciliation that happen every day. Today we believe in the resurrection by making those moments happen. This is what is exciting. The resurrection hasn't ended. It is still going on in your life and in my life and in the world around us. Jesus Christ is risen today.

Easter's aftershocks continue; tremors of resurrection abound. “Jesus Christ is risen today!” In a world that knows Good Friday all too well, God says to us and through us, “Easter is my message.” Hallelujah! Amen!

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<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

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