

“Easter Eyes”

Matthew 28:1-10, Jeremiah 31:1b-6, Psalm 118:17, 19-24, Colossians 3:1-4

Pastor James York

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Easter, the dawn of redeeming grace, every sunrise proclaims resurrection. Darkness, chaos, brokenness and death is overwhelmed, transformed, resurrected into light, love, shalom and eternal, abundant, joyful life.

Richard Rohr wrote, “Three people stood by the ocean, looking at the same sunrise. One person saw the immense physical beauty and enjoyed the event in itself. This person was the “sensate” type who, like 80 percent of the world, deals with what they can see, feel, touch, move, and fix. This was enough reality for them, for they had little interest in larger ideas, intuitions, or the grand scheme of things. The person saw with their first eye.

The second person saw the sunrise. They enjoyed all the beauty that the first person did. Like all lovers of coherent thought, technology, and science, they also enjoyed their power to make sense of the universe and explain what they discovered. They thought about the cyclical rotations of planets and stars. Through imagination, intuition, and reason, they saw with their second eye.

The third person saw the sunrise, knowing and enjoying all that the first and the second person did. But in their ability to progress from seeing to explaining to “tasting,” they also remained in awe before *an underlying mystery, coherence, and spaciousness* that connected them with everything else. They used their third eye.”

In an Easter letter before his journey through death to resurrection, Bishop Klaus Hemmerle wrote, “I wish each of us Easter eyes, able to perceive in death – life; in guilt – forgiveness; in separation – unity; in wounds – glory; in the human – God; in God – the human; and in the I – the You.”

The prophet Jeremiah proclaims his vision of Easter. **Jeremiah 31:1b-6 MSG “God’s decree—“It will be plain as the sun at high noon: I’ll be the God of every man, woman, and child in Israel and they shall be my very own people.” This is the way God put it: “They found grace out in the desert, these people who survived the killing.**

Israel, out looking for a place to rest, met God out looking for them!” God told them, “I’ve never quit loving you and never will. Expect love, love, and more love! And so now I’ll start over with you and build you up again, dear virgin Israel. You’ll resume your singing, grabbing tambourines and joining the dance. You’ll go back to your old work of planting vineyards on the Samaritan hillsides, And sit back and enjoy the fruit—oh, how you’ll enjoy those harvests! The time’s coming when watchmen will call out from the hilltops of Ephraim: ‘On your feet! Let’s go to Zion, go to meet our God!’”

Let us join with the Psalmist in praying, **Psalm 118:17, 19-24 NRSV “I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord. Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”**

The Apostle Paul explains that the Risen Christ enables us to expand our sight to see with Easter eyes. **Colossians 3:1-4 “Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God’s right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.”**

The Apostle Paul encourages us in the light of Jesus’ resurrection to develop a beyond the grave sightline. It is easy to see the tangible Good Friday stuff of earth, the death, pain, betrayal, suffering and get stuck there, in the tombs, in our own places of bondage that hinder us from living life to the fullest, to shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of us. Paul is urging us to look deeper with Easter eyes, to be alert to what God is doing and partner with God in loving, to see the resurrection glory of

everyone and everything, to see the real you, the glorious you, the resurrected, whole, perfected you. We are invited to see how we are being raised with Jesus. Christ's resurrection is not merely an event frozen in time it is much more, it launches renewed joy, love, peace, and life.

Jesus came to earth to reveal God's love to you, to fill you with God's joy, to fan into flame the spark of creativity, God's creativity that created the cosmos, which God put within you. Jesus came to wipe away every tear and heal, to forgive and make dynamic every relationship. Jesus came to give you back everything that you have lost. Jesus came to give you a glimpse of your resurrection, the resurrection of everyone, the resurrection of the entire cosmos. Jesus came to give you a new day, lighting up the terrain, shining off the snowcapped mountains, warming the waters and causing bold shadows to dance in the valley to illuminate the path to peaceful, green meadows beside invigorating streams. The dawn of redeeming grace is here.

It is daybreak in Jerusalem. The sun is almost ready to spill its gold on the horizon. Maybe there is a mist on the ground, but it is not yet light enough for that mist to bathe the world in a holy glow. Instead that mist hangs over the city and countryside like a shroud.

It is daybreak, after the longest and saddest sabbath Mary and her friends had ever had. Their friend and teacher had been arrested, beaten, humiliated, and executed. His body had been anointed for burial and placed in a cave. The women make their way there, knowing what they will find: a stone rolled in front of the mouth of that cave with all the finality and silence of the whole world. And as if the stone were not enough, there are guards. The poor women can't even grieve in privacy, they have to deal with these agents of Rome, these smirking guards, who may have been the same ones who shoved a crown of thorns on Jesus' head, the ones who divvied up his clothes two days before.

And yet the women come. In Matthew's telling, they don't come to anoint the body—that's already been done. They don't come with any purpose whatsoever. They just come to Jesus' grave, for the same reason that we visit cemeteries clutching flowers, or listen to the song that we danced to at the wedding, or make the ham just like mother used to. Because that's what love and grief require of us.

But the women don't have any expectation that something unexpected will happen. They know what they'll find there. Grief, it seems, is its own sad landscape—look at it frontwards, or backwards, it's still the same message: Dead is dead. The lost ones stay lost.

There is no second chance. The person is gone and there's no bringing them back. Except. Except. Except this one time, two thousand years ago, a messenger comes and rolls up his dazzling white sleeves. This one time an ambassador from the heavens puts his shoulder against that rock and strains and grunts to move it... or maybe he just flicks it with the power of his angelic fingers. This one time he straddles it like a child and says, "Look, Mary. Look. Jesus is not here." This one time, life stares death in the face and said, "Not today you don't."

I don't know how it happened. I don't even know what happened. But it has to be more than just the miracle of spring. It has to be more than the rising sun, and daffodils stretching their green stalks into the air, and baby birds in nests, and caterpillars turning into butterflies. Otherwise there's no reason for any of us to ever come to an Easter service. We've got better things to do with a beautiful Sunday morning. And yet, every year, we come. And we come because we don't know how it happened, but we believe, we hope, we know that it is more than just a metaphor, immensely more.

Something happened that one time—resurrection happened that one time—and because it did, we look at every other death and grief and dead end and heartache and illness and loss and struggle and say, "This is not the end. This is not over, not near over."

Matthew 28:1-10 MSG "After the Sabbath, as the first light of the new week dawned, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to keep vigil at the tomb. Suddenly the earth reeled and rocked under their feet as God's angel came down from heaven, came right up to where they were standing. He rolled back the stone and then sat on it. Shafts of lightning blazed from him. His garments shimmered snow-white. The guards at the tomb were scared to death. They were so frightened, they couldn't move. The angel spoke to the women: "There is nothing to fear here. I know you're looking for Jesus, the One they nailed to the cross. He is not here. Jesus was raised, just as he said. Come and look at the place where he was placed. "Now, get on your way quickly and tell his disciples, 'Jesus is risen from the dead. Jesus is going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see Jesus there.' That's the message." The women, deep in wonder and full of joy, lost no time in leaving the tomb. They ran to tell the disciples. Then Jesus

met them, stopping them in their tracks. “Good morning!” Jesus said. They fell to their knees, embraced his feet, and worshiped him. Jesus said, “You’re holding on to me for dear life! Don’t be frightened like that. Go tell my brothers that they are to go to Galilee, and that I’ll meet them there.”

Easter opens up a whole new future that was inconceivable before the resurrection. Don’t be fearful. Don’t hold on. Mark Brown wrote, “For Jesus to stand to his full height, he had to leave the small, dark place of the tomb. For us to rise up to our full stature, we must leave the small, dark places of life. We must leave the many and various tombs of this earthly life, and find our way to the broad, open, and light-filled places.” Thomas Merton illustrates, “In the old days, on Easter night, the Russian peasants used to carry the blessed fire home from church. The light would scatter and travel in all directions through the darkness, and the desolation of the night would be pierced and dispelled as lamps came on in the windows of the farmhouses, one by one. Even so, the glory of God sleeps everywhere, ready to blaze out unexpectedly in created things. Even so, God’s peace and God’s order lie hidden in the world, even the world of today, ready to reestablish themselves in God’s way, in God’s own good time—but never without the instrumentality of free options made by free people.

The angel said, “You will see Jesus.” That is the message.

Love is stronger than death. That is what today is about. Also, love is *stranger* than death. That is what today is really about. Love is *stranger* than death.

Death follows the rules. People live, then they die. Beginning and ending, it’s the logic of the world. But love, especially Easter love, is strange. It is unpredictable. Love can bring life out of death; love can move a stone away from a tomb and empty it of its contents; love can inspire a band of women to feel joy and wonder. They don’t get it, they’re a little freaked out by it... but they like it, and they can’t wait to tell the others. The landscape has changed. Everything has changed.

Synthesis newsletter explains, “Jesus traced the sign of the cross across our cold, gray world nearly 2000 years ago. Since then, many individuals, nations, and groups have tried to bury Jesus. Almost all (including ourselves) have at some time or another left him for dead. But by God’s grace, love always wins out, and the perennial response always echoes back: “Jesus is risen!””

Love is stranger than death, forgiving old hurts, healing wounds, rekindling joy, opening us to abundant life, transforming us. We know the resurrection story, yet it takes eternity to see all that resurrection will do with us, how the joyful, loving life of God will complete us. Easter is an invitation to see further into our resurrection.

Susanne Metz wrote, “Touched by the Resurrection, may we become again innocent and joyful, radiating the power of Christ’s transforming love.”

Joan Chittister said, “To say, “I believe in Jesus Christ who rose from the dead” is to say something about myself at the same time. It says that I myself am ready to be transformed. Once the Christ-life rises in me, I rise to new life as well. “Christ is risen; we are risen,””

N. T. Wright said, “Easter was when Hope in person surprised the whole world by coming forward from the future into the present.” In a strange and wonderful way, Jesus’ resurrection stands behind us in history, around us in our daily life, and pulls us toward transformations and ever greater experiences of joyful love.

Love is stranger than death, because this one time, a long time ago, the light broke in. And because it happened that one time, it will happen again and again and again, it will happen to each of us.

One of the joys of growing up on the farm was seeing the sunrise every day. The light peeking over the horizon in dazzling colors, followed by the brilliant warm light rising into the sky revealing fields of growing crops, newborn calves and the trees clapping their hands.

My favorite way to backpack is to hike up a mountain in the dark. The headlamp illumines the trail but little scenery. I can see only the obstacles right in front of me as I strain and sweat, my heart pounding as I make my way up the mountain. The way the breeze dances on my skin, using my third eye I can sense the steep drop off and vast openness to one side and the towering mountain on the other, even though my headlamp does not enable me to see either of them. I do my research reading trail guides, following maps, calculating distances, to get to the vista while it is still dark, trusting that the view will inspire. Sometimes I even find a picture or hear someone explain the beauty. I sit in the dark, unable to see anything, but distant sounds indicate I am high up. The predawn light reveals bit by bit more and more of the landscape. Every second the colors change and the scene grows. A few times I have even noticed the atmosphere and the curvature of the earth. When the earth

spins the sun over the horizon, long shadows cling to their casters. As I scan the landscape each second reveals more details. The sunrise fills me with wonder.

In the context of eternity, our earth-life is like the hike up the mountain in the dark. There are plenty of obstacles and struggle. We are never sure exactly where we are at, where we are going, and if we arrived at the right location. We perceive glimpses of resurrection glory in the embrace of love and the laughter of joy. We get a taste of resurrection in those moments when everything feels perfect. We read about the resurrection in the Bible. Jesus modeled and told us about resurrection. We cherish resurrection morsels in comebacks, forgiveness, and second chances. Our third eye, our soul, gives us intuition of resurrection. Every Easter we celebrate resurrection even though we cannot fathom the magnificent, glorious, spender of the resurrection that is coming for you, for all of us and all of creation. May your tasting of resurrection transform you to enjoy basking in the wondrous dawn of God's redeeming grace, illumine you to share and savor love and enhance your Easter eyes.

Death is defeated. Nothing good is over. Everything is beginning. Love is stranger than death. We celebrate Easter, seeing somehow, God's love embracing us into resurrection that is grandeur than all the hopes and dreams of all people. Christ's resurrection has flashed forth enabling us, and all the cosmos, to play, leap and rejoice, filling all with an infinite array of loves. Amen