

“Easter Christ Is Risen! All Will Be Resurrected!”

Isaiah 25:6-9, Psalm 118:1, 14, 17, 21-24, & John 20:1-20

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April 4, 2021

Prayer for Understanding Startle us, O God, with your truth. Open our hearts and minds to the good news that Jesus Christ is risen. Open our spirits and our intellects to the news that life is ever the Lord of death and that love shall never lose its own. Amen

The prophet Isaiah foretells of resurrection for all.

Isaiah 25:6-9 NLT “In Jerusalem, the Lord of Heaven’s Host will spread a wonderful feast for all the people of the world. It will be a delicious banquet with clear, well-aged wine and choice meat. There God will remove the cloud of gloom, the shadow of death that hangs over the earth. God will swallow up death forever! The Sovereign Lord will wipe away all tears. God will remove forever all insults and mockery against God’s land and people. The Lord has spoken! In that day, the people will proclaim, “This is our God! We trusted in God, and God saved us! This is the Lord, in whom we trusted. Let us rejoice in the salvation God brings!”

The psalmist joyful sings of resurrection for all.

Psalm 118:1, 14, 17, 21-24 NRSV “O give thanks to the LORD, for God is good; God’s steadfast love endures forever! The LORD is my strength and my might; God has become my salvation. I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD. 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.”

Peter preached about resurrection for all. **Acts 10:34-43 NLT “Then Peter replied, “I see very clearly that God shows no partiality. In every nation God accepts those who revere God and do what is right. This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after John began preaching his message of baptism. And you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed, for God was with Jesus. “And we are witnesses of all Jesus did throughout Judea and in Jerusalem. They put Jesus to death by hanging him on a cross, but God raised Jesus to life on the third day. Then God allowed Jesus to appear, not to the general public, but to us whom God had chosen in advance to be God’s witnesses. We were those who ate and drank with Jesus after he rose from the dead. And Jesus ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all—the living and the dead. Jesus is the one all the prophets testified about, saying that everyone who believes in God will have their sins forgiven through Jesus’ name.”**

The gospel of John’s account of the resurrection.

John 20:1-20 NLT “Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, “They have taken the Lord’s body out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn’t go in. Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, while the cloth that had covered Jesus’ head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed—for until then they still hadn’t understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. Then they went home. Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. “Dear woman, why are you crying?” the angels asked her. “Because they have taken away my Lord,” she replied, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him. “Dear woman, why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. “Who are you looking for?” She thought he was the gardener. “Sir,” she said, “if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.” “Mary!” Jesus said. She turned to him and

cried out, “Rabboni!” (which is Hebrew for “Teacher”). “Don’t cling to me,” Jesus said, “for I haven’t yet ascended to God. But go find my sisters and brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the Lord!” Then she gave them his message. That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! “Peace be with you,” Jesus said. As he spoke, Jesus showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord!”

Jesus is risen! Jesus is risen indeed! They saw the resurrected Jesus and were filled with joy.

Sooner or later, what goes up must come down. This is the principle of gravity. Our Gospel writer John understood this principle. John’s Gospel is radical because of the great reversal. In Chapter 3, John spelled out the principle in reverse: “No one has ascended into heaven, except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.” In other words, Jesus who has come down must go up. For John, the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus could never be comprehended by people whose beliefs were limited by the physical principles of nature.

Resurrection and ascension are not natural events. Death is natural. Gravity is natural. So, when the early Christians proclaimed Jesus to be risen, they were in fact confessing the incomparable power of God—a God who was not only the creator of nature and all its principles, and also the sole master over all and certainly not constrained by anything or anyone.

Easter, the great reversal, is a mystery that changes everything and everyone. Hopefully, Easter inspires you to question everything. Question not to make sense of this miraculous event. None of us can fully understand Easter. At best we perceive minuscule fragments of the glory of Easter and all the reversals it will produce for us and the cosmos. Questions about our life. How will Easter resurrect us? Questions about our relationships. How will Easter make every relationship harmonious, wonderful, and delightful? Questions about the cosmos. Since we are only perceiving the dull, drab, preresurrection seeds, how can we even imagine the resurrected fully complete and perfected cosmos? Questions about every setback, failure, and shattered dream. How will Easter resurrect and fulfill beyond our grandest imagination every pure dream? Questions about infinite. How will every love, joy, and goodness be resurrected, savored by all in heaven and continually expand for eternity? How will we be able to take in ever-growing resurrection glory?

Jesus is alive and risen. Death—the great equalizer, the one and only thing in life that is common and inescapable and final for every last one of us—death is suddenly off the table. And since death is merely the portal to resurrection then everything is off the table. Nothing is impossible. Everything is possible.

Think about your own life and about the things that have come to be “givens” for you—things that simply are the way they are, and it seems they will never change. Are you stuck in a relationship that you think cannot possibly improve? Do you arrive at work some mornings convinced that you are going to have a bad day? Is there something about your family that has frustrated you for years? Has an injury shattered your dreams? Does it seem that school will always be difficult for you? Is depression bringing you down? Is your health limiting your activities? Does it seem like the pandemic will hinder life forever? The good news of Easter is all those things, everything, all, will be resurrected. Every good outcome is back on the table. And not just in the future in heaven, right here on earth as well, whenever one is inspired by Easter and moved to action by resurrection thinking. Easter gives us confident hope that nothing is out of the question, on earth, today. There can be plenty for every person to enjoy food, shelter, education, and health care. Politics can be friendly, effective, beneficial for all and can guide us to live the most excellent way of love. Every relationship can be wonderful. All people around the world can be united and everyone can celebrate each other’s unique diversity. People who work for these things are resurrection people, because in a world that is seemingly bound by natural laws, they are convinced that nothing is impossible, rather that everything is possible. Easter is a mystery that our soul is drawn to enjoy. The Easter mystery is changing everyone and the cosmos. Easter the great reversal, what goes down will go up, life follows every form of death.

Having followed Jesus throughout his ministry, we have seen and empathetically felt for Jesus whenever he encountered the constraints of his own physical limitations. As his popularity grew, everywhere Jesus went, crowds of people pressed around him, hoping to be healed, fed, taught, and touched by him. They could never get enough of Jesus. Jesus trying to be all things to all people must have been exhausting. Trying to heal every disease, ease every pain, accompany every mourner, address every wrong, Jesus must have struggled with his human limitations to be with all people everywhere and at one time. How painful this must have been for Jesus, for he knew that the world needed not only a Wonderful Counselor, a Mighty God, a Prince of Peace, but also Emmanuel, “God with us.” Jesus knew that the world needed him to be with everyone. It would not be enough for him to be all things for some and not for others, for him to be with some and not with others. John writes of this predicament. Jesus said, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it

remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Jesus, in preparing his disciples for his death, wanted them, and us, to know that his death would bear much more fruit than his physical life ever could. Jesus knew that, when raised he would be able to “draw all people” to God. The resurrected Jesus is with everyone. The resurrected Jesus will carry us all to heaven to our glorious home that Jesus has already prepared for us, adding every one of our delights to our space. John understood the paradox that only by ascending beyond the constraints of Jesus’ human physical limitations could Jesus truly be with everyone. John’s bold proclamation was not simply that the tomb was empty, Jesus is alive, and that the risen Jesus appeared, which are in themselves amazing events, but moreover that Jesus was ascending. To Mary, who was the first to encounter the risen Lord, Jesus said, “Do not hold onto me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and sisters and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my God and your God.’” Do not hold onto the old ways, limited thinking, the pain, grief, and suffering. Grief distorts our perception making it challenging to see the risen Jesus. Imagine Mary’s transformation when she recognized Jesus.

Jesus prepared his disciples for his death and then guided them through their grief to the joy of resurrection. I am blessed to have a wonderful, caring, supportive, loving mother. Aspects of death hindered our relationship. On earth, my mom had several health issues including acute lupus. She was also a worrier. On earth her pain and worry damaged our relationship. I have abundant memories of joyful, fun loving times with my Mom. Now that my Mom is resurrected in heaven there are other memories that are fading. When my Mom had an intense pain day, she was cranky, demanding, and it seemed like she expected my Dad and I to be able to read her mind as to her needs. On these challenging days we would go into the house and check on my Mom’s wellbeing, then even if all our work were completed for the day, we would work on upcoming projects avoiding my mom. Technically, my Mom was dead for a few minutes when I was in junior high before the paramedics brought her back to life. My mother’s realization that she could die at any time fueled my Mom’s worry. I received plenty of safety talks and advice on how to live life. My Mom came from a poor family, money was always tight on the farm, so she worried that I would not have enough money to survive. There were plenty of talks on the importance of saving and only spending money if it is an absolute need of necessity. Often our parents’ worries get imbedded in us. I am a frugal, conservative person when it comes to money. Since my Mom’s resurrection, I have had a few vivid dreams of my Mom communicating with me. She is radiant, caring, loving, wonderful, and fun. I realize that the pain, worry, and crankiness of my mother were never her true self, they were forms of death that impeded our relationship. At resurrection, Jesus banishes every form of death, so the true person with all their love shines again. It will be a marvelous day when I am reunited with my mother and for the first time will be able to see her love in glorious fullness.

On earth, all our relationships are impaired with forms of death, perhaps like my Mom’s pain or something else, perhaps depression or addictions or vices. Some of our love is hindered by forms of death with which we have no control, other forms of death we have limited power and some we choose. Forms of death damage our relationship with others, God, and ourselves. Easter promises that every form of death will be banished allowing the love to burst forth forever. Easter promises that all relationships will be glorious.

Easter invites us to live into the glorious perfect loving person we will become today. Easter invites us to look past the dull fading physical body of each other with all the imperfections of our restrictive shell and forms of death to each person’s unique eternal splendor. Easter invites us to nurture our relationships imagining how every relationship will be marvelous. Therein lies a revelatory fragment of the power of Easter. Easter is not a, once-and-for-all, self-contained, event. Easter is always happening. Easter is resurrecting everyone and all. Easter is a mysterious event that is mostly unfathomable. Easter will ascend us into our heavenly family. So, we can stop looking for Jesus in the tomb. We can stop searching for his body. In every tragedy, we can be certain that an Easter resurrection will make all glorious.

The hymn “Christ Is Alive!” was written by pastor Brian Wren for Easter Sunday 1968, just 10 days after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., was assassinated. Brian wanted to acknowledge this terrible loss while also proclaiming that all will be resurrected. “Christ is alive!” he wrote. “Let Christians sing. The cross stands empty to the sky. Let streets and homes with praises ring. Love, drowned in death, shall never die.” Yes, a terrible crime had been committed on the cross. An awful injustice had been done. But now the cross was empty, and love will live forever. The hymn makes clear that the resurrection is not stuck in history, rather a reality at every turn. The risen Christ, says Brian is “saving, healing, here and now, and touching every place and time.” Jesus meets human suffering whenever it is experienced. In the face of today’s racism and violence, Jesus “suffers still, yet loves the more.” The hymn then ends with the good news of “justice, love and praise.”

Easter invites us to live into the glory of resurrection. Jesus is much more than with us every moment of our lives, Jesus is also ahead of us, ascended, resurrecting, and drawing us to our resurrection. Amen

