

# “Expanding Connections”

Luke 24:1-12 & John 14:27, 20:19-22 & 30-31

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**Prayer for Understanding** Holy God, we so often long for more. We want more than the hamster wheel life of to-do lists and errands, meal prep and alarm clocks. We want more than comparison and competition. We want more than certainty that drowns out curiosity. We want more than fear that leads to violence. We want a life that is teeming with alleluias. We want a life overcrowded with hope. We want a life congested with good news. We want a life jam-packed with forgiveness. We want a life bursting with laughter. We want a life so full that the stone just has to be rolled away. So today we pray—break the dam. Dust the cobwebs from our ears. Clear space in our minds to hear you clearly. Speak to us as only you can. It’s what we long for. We long for you. Gratefully we pray, amen.

Jesus Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Death swallowed by glorious resurrection life. God is ushering in an expansive life, ever expanding infinitely beyond our grandest imagination. There are a multitude of dimensions, aspects, and layers, all of them are being expanded and glorified. Expansive life that heals every hurt, restores every loss, and fulfills every good dream. Expansive life that heals every suffering, soothes every grief, and unites you with all people across time, space, and every divide. Expansive life that removes every barrier, makes vibrant every relationship and triumphs over every obstacle. Expansive life that makes full every emptiness, lavishes grace on every mistake and transforms every aspect that diminishes life to life giving splendor. Expansive life that sets us free, completes us, and unites us in harmonious love with all people and with the entire cosmos. Expansive life that is drawing you to abundant life, making your joy complete and causing you to shine with the glory of resurrection. However, you are restricted, you are being freed. Easter proclaims that whatever, whoever, is missing in your life, God is providing.

We have journeyed through lent exploring God’s lavish love, unending grace, permeating peace, unabated joy, and the majesty of God’s grace who is bringing us all home. Many of us have heard this epic love story numerous times, it is a familiar story. Open yourself for the unexpected. Bend down, look into the tomb. Overcome fear. Stare down death. The tomb of separation of Covid, of political division, of 23 countries currently at war. The tomb of scarcity, suffering, and languishing. The tomb of feelings of inadequacy, depression, and hate. Bend down, look into your personal tombs. Resurrection is everywhere. Lay your embalming spices down. Let go of what you know. Stop looking for the living among the dead. Embrace resurrection. Run into expansive life. Do not be daunted by the symbols and signs of death. Do not be overwhelmed by what is or what you hope will be. Loosen your grasp from what captivates and distracts. Look for the living. Live.

*New Life is Right Here*

*a poem by Sarah Speed*

Maybe today we can take a moment.

Maybe today we can silence the inner critic.

Maybe today we can leave perfection at the door.

Maybe today we can allow ourselves to be here.

Maybe that’s all that matters.

Maybe this sunrise is for us.

Maybe these Hallelujahs are for us.

Maybe the hope blooming in my chest is for us.

Maybe the resurrection was not just about God’s body, but is about our body.

Maybe this new life reaches all the way to the edges.

Maybe we are free to live in a new way where love is the currency and we are enough.

Maybe that’s what this is all about—

not a relentless pursuit of more

but God’s relentless pursuit of me.

New life is right here.

Like the women—say it out loud.

Like Peter—run that way.

Women go to the tomb with spices to tend to Jesus' body. When they find the tomb empty and are stunned by the presence and words of the angels in dazzling clothing, they remember. They remember what Jesus had said, which compels them to go out and tell the story. Even in utter shock, they return to their deepest knowing and allow themselves to receive the expansiveness of resurrection. Their imaginations and hearts expand and they take action in response. God shows them how to live again.

Readings from the gospels of Luke and John. **Luke 24:1-12 NRSV But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? Jesus is not here, but has risen. Remember how Jesus told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again."** Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened."

**John 20:19-22 & 30-31 NRSV "When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After Jesus said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As God has sent me, so I send you." When Jesus had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in Jesus' name."**

The expanding life of Easter is everywhere. God is loving all into expansive life. God is connecting all. God is showing you how to live again.

It is still the first day of the week, because the processes of the new creation are still unfolding. In the morning, the disciples realize Jesus is with God. In the evening, the disciples discover that Jesus is simultaneously in their midst. Jesus is both with God (ascension) and with everyone (resurrection). This simultaneous presence emphasizes that Jesus is connection for everyone and everything. God's love bursts through the disconnection of death. Every disconnect is being connected by God.

In the beginning, the breath of God created all. All was connected, united, and synergistic. Love flowed freely everywhere. It was good. Separation entered the good creation through blame, jealousy, fear, hate, and murder. Disconnection and separation emerged. God graciously forgave and urged humanity to be gracious, to love God, love each other, love self.

Jesus brought everyone together. Every teaching, every healing, every action restored connections bringing people together in loving community. Jesus poured God's lavish grace into everyone enabling them to be gracious, to love others, to love self, and love God. When Jesus was crucified, the disciples were unable to perceive Jesus, the connection force of the cosmos, so they scattered, betrayed, denied, ran, grieved, and cowered in fear. For three days, they lost their connections. We continue to struggle with disconnection. A mere unintentional remark, a careless word, a mistake, wounds another driving us apart, damaging years of a loving relationship. Circumstances beyond our control, such as Covid separate us. We live in our world with a myriad of disconnections. Easter proclaims that every disconnection is being resurrected. All will be connected.

God breathed into the clay of the earth and humans became living souls. In the evening, the resurrected Jesus breathed on the disciples to connect them. Today, our risen Lord breathes into us, resurrecting us, connecting us.

Jesus gives peace, shalom, completeness, perfect connection. God's peace is not like worldly peace. The peace of the world is fleeting, it comes and goes, it can be broken, lost, and distorted. Worldly peace gives and takes away. The security of one moment is replaced by the anxiety of the next moment. The world is unable to sustain peace. The joy of love can be ignored by the blindness of hate. God always graciously gives. Love endures forever. God is connecting all. God's peace is ever expanding and never fails. Jesus said: **John 14:27 NRSV "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."** Do not be troubled or afraid, you will enjoy loving relationships forever with your family, friends, and enemies. Do not be troubled or afraid, nothing can keep us disconnected. Republicans and Democrats

will unite. Russians and Ukrainians will celebrate together. Everyone will be welcomed home, everyone has a place at the Lord's table where Jesus, the connector, unites all. Jesus is peace who transcends every disconnection.

Mary Oliver wrote: "Instructions for living a life: Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it." Bend down, look into the tomb for yourself. Go right up to the scariest, ugliest, saddest place in the world, before the sun has risen, and look without flinching into every dark corner. Do not be afraid. Do not be troubled. Even when it makes you weep, go right up to the tomb and look in. Lay your embalming spices down. Let go of what you know. Stop looking for the living among the dead. Embrace resurrection. Breathe in peace. Run into expansive life. Do not be daunted by the symbols and signs of death. Do not be overwhelmed by what is or what you hope will be. Loosen your grasp from what captivates and distracts. Look for the living. Live.

We live in an already and not yet season. Easter will connect all. We are invited to partner with God in speeding the time when every connection is resurrected. We are invited to be like the women, to proclaim the good news of Easter. Embrace Easter, let Easter expand your imagination. Let Easter propel your love.

God's breath is filling you, resurrecting you, expanding grace, untethering love. Easter is an invitation to join the work of the Holy Spirit, who is loving to make all things one, to connect everyone in joyful, peaceful, loving community. A path to oneness is forgiveness. Sin tries to separate. Jesus takes away the sin of the world. Jesus takes away the separations of the world. Easter urges us to let go of anything that disconnects and receive connecting love. A dimension of resurrection is the freedom to overcome every disconnection to live into harmonious community.

When fear and trouble diminish your life, return to the empty tomb, remember resurrection, receive expansive hope, trust the promise of ever-expanding life. What aspect of expansive life is God inviting you to live today? What does that life look and feel like? How will you continue to live into God's expansiveness? What will you do today to connect?

Love is stronger than death. Grace is stronger than disconnection. Jesus is connecting all. These are merely a few signs of Easter. We share them to expand life. There are a multitude of dimensions, aspects, and layers, all of them are being expanded and glorified. We are merely beginning to explore who we are and who we are becoming. God created us with an infinite capacity to love, rejoice, and create. We are only aware of a minuscule snippet of Easter. You have only started to live. God is giving you ever expanding life.

One aspect of Easter is being at peace with yourself, your mind, body, feelings, emotions, spirit, all flourishing. Another aspect of Easter is being at peace with all people, everyone loving each other, everyone serving together, everyone celebrating together. Imagine the glory of just these two aspects of Easter. We gather to share our grand imaginations. Just these two aspects of Easter are glorious and there is an ever-expanding multitude of Easter goodness that we will enjoy forever. Easter is a constant reminder of what was, a good creation, Jesus glorious resurrection, what is, grace connecting every disconnection and what is coming, glorious resurrections for all in every way, every form, and every manner. Whether your 1 or 101, you are just starting to live. Easter is an invitation to live into expansive life. Amen