

“Resurrection Joy”

John 11:25, 17:13, 20:1-20; Mark 15:34; Isaiah 25:6-9, 55:12; 1 Corinthians 13:8, 15:54-57; Romans 8:38-39

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In “Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth” Walter Brueggemann writes, “So we come in our bewilderment and wonderment, deeply trusting, almost afraid to trust much, passionately insisting, too timid to insist much, fervently hoping, exhausted for hoping too much. Look upon us in our deep need. . . . You defeater of death, whose power could not hold you, come in your Easter, come in your sweeping victory, come in your glorious new life. . . . Hear our thankful, grateful, unashamed Hallelujah!”

Jesus told Mary, **John 11:25 “I am the resurrection and the Life!”** God promises **1 Corinthians 13:8 “Love never ends, love will last forever”** and **Romans 8:38-39 “Nothing can separate us from God’s love, not even death.”** Numerous times Jesus explained to Mary the details of Holy Week that after three days he would rise to glorious eternal life. Mary believed Jesus, yet the fear, hate, pain, darkness and death of this world at times overwhelms even the strongest faith.

David Davis in “A gospel You Can Taste” wrote, “More than Jesus died on Friday afternoon. So did his followers’ hope that in him something new and beautiful and hopeful actually had come on earth. Hearing him teach, watching him with the sick and the children, watching him gently restore calmness to a man in the throes of psychosis, watching him lovingly understand and console a desperate father, you could almost imagine a world like that: a world where goodness and kindness and gentleness prevail, not meanness and cruelty and violence. You could almost imagine a world where God wipes the tears from all eyes, a world where people of different races, ethnicities, and religions sit down together at a banquet table. You could almost imagine a world where children are fed and all the sick cared for, a world where there are no concealed firearms and innocent children are not gunned down in the streets and sidewalks, where the elderly are secure, and where precious resources are joyfully invested in life, not weapons systems.”

Jesus and all Mary’s hopes and dreams died on Friday. Three days later Mary was still wrought with grief. Mary stumbled, wiped away tears and felt her way up the rugged path in darkness to the tomb. The gospel of John explains **John 20:1-15 “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. 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." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that Jesus must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 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. 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." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus."

Peter and John saw the empty tomb, however they still did not understand, so they went home. Mary saw the empty tomb. Mary saw two angels. Mary even saw Jesus but Mary did not recognize Jesus so she continued to weep.

Most of us are very familiar with what Peter, John and Mary were going through, feeling and thinking. We too have heard God's promise of eternal love and resurrection. Most of us have heard Jesus teachings and have seen glimpses of the Kingdom of God. We have hopes and dreams. We have loved and served to make the world more like heaven. Yet there are times when it all falls apart, when death seems so very final. We join Mary and the disciples alone, afraid, alarmed, trembling, anxious, empty, grieving, weeping. We join Jesus who for a moment as he cried **Mark 15:34 "My God, My God why you forsaken me."** felt alone, unloved, that death was final.

Let us pray, "Startle us, O God, with your truth. Startle us, as you started fearful, grieving, despondent men and women early in the morning on the first day of the week long ago, with news so good they couldn't completely comprehend it, could only sing it and shout it and live it the rest of their lives. So come to us this day, with life and hope and courage and love in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

The gospel of John continues **John 20:16-20 "Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). 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.'" 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. 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."

Mary, you, and I, are not alone, we are loved by God. God speaks our name. We will recognize Jesus. We will glimpse resurrection all around us: in the first flower after winter, a deep breath after congestion, a pay check after unemployment, a tender embrace reviving a broken relationship, laughter after depression, a wave of resurrection peace after the grief of death. Every hope and dream is resurrected. Every aspect of Jesus ministry is coming. With the darkness fleeing behind us, we will see Jesus and the rising sun before us. Like Mary we will likely want to embrace Jesus. Jesus will refuse for Jesus has so much more resurrection glory for us to experience. Jesus' Greek word that we often translate "do not hold on to me," means do not try to confine, control and limit God. Resurrection is not an idea or a positive thinking exercise. The resurrection is real, physical life, after death. The resurrection is God's power at work redeeming, restoring, and renewing everyone and all the cosmos. Jesus resurrection means everything that Jesus taught and lived is true and is coming. This is way too wonderful for us to even start to grasp, understand or hold onto. We will enjoy every aspect of the good news and the Kingdom of God We will enjoy eternal resurrection life.

Pastor John Buchanan preached, "What we must not do on this day is the very thing we American Presbyterians want most to do, namely come up with a rational explanation. After all, things like this just don't happen. So maybe it was Jesus' teachings that live on. Maybe his spirit lives among us, like Shakespeare's or Beethoven's. Maybe he lives in the flowers of spring. There is no better way to deflect or diffuse Easter than that. The resurrection will not submit to rational analysis. Rather it is the event that most suggests that there is truth that transcends logic. There is a God who exists beyond our ability to understand."

In the darkness, before dawn, Mary was weeping, devastated—as we are sometimes, by the senseless cruelty of the world, the randomness of evil and death. Mary heard Jesus say her name and knew in ways she did not fully understand, at a place deep in her soul, that Jesus was the victor, not death; that the last word about Jesus was not death but life and love; that the meaning she and each and every one of us longs for was in Jesus, a risen Lord; that God has created you for life, love and joy; that whatever is happening in your life today, whatever you are dealing with, worried about, struggling with, afraid of, there is resurrection power alive and at work in the world and in your life. God is on your side. God is resurrecting you. Earthly death and pain in all of its forms are real, but, all of it is defeated, all of it is temporary. It is being replaced with the joyful glory of resurrection. Jesus Christ is risen.

Frederick Buechner in "The End Is Life" wrote, "The proclamation of Easter Day is that all is well. And as a Christian, I say this not with the easy optimism of one who has never known a time when all was not well but as one who has faced the Cross in all its obscenity as well as in all its glory, who has known one way or another what it is like to

live separated from God. In the end, God's will, not ours, is done. Love is the victor. Death is not the end. The end is life. Jesus life and our lives through Jesus, in Jesus. Existence has greater depths of beauty, mystery, and benediction than the wildest visionary ever dared to dream. Christ our Lord has risen."

Our scripture from the gospel of John ends today with **John 20:20** "Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord." Jesus said, **John 17:13** "I am coming to you, so that you may have my joy made complete in yourself." You also have seen Jesus in every joy you have experienced. God is joy. He has created a cosmos and humanity to mirror God's joy. Easter is God restoring all to eternal joyful life. This lent we have been celebrating and sharing joys. The joys we experience are just precursors, a foretaste, snippet of the full joy of resurrection that is coming to us. You have seen Jesus in your joys, in those moments when everything felt wonderful. You have seen Jesus in joyful sights, books, movies, smells, sounds, tastes and experiences.

The prophet Isaiah saw the Lord, rejoiced, and wrote. **Isaiah 25:6-9** "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. And God will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; God will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of God's people God will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for God, so that God might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in God's salvation." You will see God in the joy of delicious meals, in God's saving work, in reunion, in the laughter of family and friends. God's resurrection joy is way to wonderful to grasp in your mind so you are invited to taste and see the joyful goodness of God.

The Apostle Paul saw the Lord, rejoiced and wrote. **1 Corinthians 15:54-57** "In the resurrection scheme of things, this has to happen: everything perishable taken off the shelves and replaced by the imperishable, this mortal replaced by the immortal. Then the saying will come true: Death swallowed by triumphant Life! Who got the last word, oh, Death? Oh, Death, who's afraid of you now? It was sin that made death so frightening and law-code guilt that gave sin its leverage, its destructive power. But now in a single victorious stroke of Life, all three—sin, guilt, death—are gone, the gift of our Master, Jesus Christ. Thank God!" Death has been conquered. Every tear, every hurt, every form of brokenness is being healed by the power of resurrection. Death is a journey into glorious eternal life. Your joys and love are mere, faint precursors of the magnificent joy and love of full resurrection. When you celebrate and cherish your joy, then the love for each one will be enhanced, magnified and enjoyed by you and all of heaven for eternity. The resurrected Jesus is reassuring you that you will always be loved, that nothing will ever separate you from God's love. The living

Jesus is setting you free to live abundantly to love extravagantly and to celebrate abundantly. The Risen Jesus is calling your name.

The prophet Isaiah heard the Lord, rejoiced and wrote. **Isaiah 55:12** “**So you will go out in joy, you will be led into a whole and complete life. The mountains and hills will lead the parade, bursting with song. All the trees of the forest will join the procession, exuberant with applause.**” Let us pray, startle us Risen Jesus, help us see you and the joy of glorious resurrection. Amen