

# “The Good News Is Alive!”

*Matthew 28:1-10*

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**Prayer for Understanding** Holy One, help us hear the Easter story, how death has lost its sting. Speak to us. Soften the calloused parts of our hearts until we can sense your Holy Spirit in our midst. With eagerness and hope, we run to the tomb. We sing alleluia. We bow our heads. We listen for you. Help us take in Easter resurrection. Amen.

The good news is alive! Death cannot stop the good news. Betrayal, denial, hate, violence, atrocities, apathy, and fear cannot stop the good news of restored loving community for everyone.

The good news is nothing can separate us from God’s love. Not Judas’ betrayal. Not Peter’s denials. Not the disciples’ inability to keep watch for a mere hour. Not Judas’ suicide. Absolutely nothing can separate us from God’s love. Jesus knew the many sins and failures of the disciples and knows they all will fail and sin in the future. Jesus excludes no one from the table and foot washing. Jesus’ lovingly gave each of them the bread of life, the cup of forgiveness, the nourishment of God, fellowship, and community. Jesus does not define us by our worst act. Put yourself in Judas’s shoes. Jesus knelt and washed Judas’ feet signify forgiveness, being washed cleaned, being baptized into glory, a beloved member of God’s family, a person God delights in loving and loving through to expand the joy, love, and goodness of the cosmos. No one is judged, which means we are free to extend grace to others. The good news is that God’s radical, unstoppable love extends to all people, even to those who wrong us, even to us on our worst days. We are commanded to love one another as Jesus loves us.

Pastor Lizzie McManus-Dail wrote: “Jesus’ mercy is not just unmerited; God’s mercy is scandalous. I would much rather reflect on how Jesus is with us in times of trial. How Jesus walks with us when we are in the valley of the shadow of death. It is not that I relish being in said valley of the shadow of death. It is that, when I am grieving, or struggling or clearly a victim, the mercy of Jesus feels, soothing. But Jesus’ mercy is not just confined to clean, easily identifiable victims. Jesus steps right into the traumatic muck of betrayal, sin and corruption and says: Even here, I love you. Judas should have been cancelled. Instead, Jesus kneels at Judas’s feet and washes them clean. All confrontational nonviolence done in Jesus’ name invites the oppressor to be human again, not through dehumanizing power, but through the humility of our interdependence on each other. It is both unsurprising and devastating that, after his feet have been washed, Judas still runs to betray his Lord, just as it remains unsurprising and devastating when our enemies and oppressors do the same. But Jesus, truly human, and truly God, knew this would happen. And Jesus washes Judas’s feet, anyway.”

Easter good news is nothing can separate you from God’s love. Every impurity will be washed clean allowing our glory to shine. We will enjoy loving relationships with all people. Surely, everyone will dwell in household of God as a beloved family member forever.

“If You Hear Nothing Else, Then Hear This”

*a poem by Sarah Speed*

“You can make a fool of yourself. You can bet on the wrong thing, lose it all, unravel people’s trust. You can laugh at a funeral, curse in a church, say the wrong thing at the wrong time, every time. You can lose yourself in a bottle, a relationship, a false sense of security. You can uncover prejudice and wrestle with the shame of it all. You can withhold an apology, blame it on someone else, tell yourself it is not your fault. You can trade in love for a bag of coins. And even then, even still, even now, Jesus will love you enough to wash your feet. If you hear nothing else in the gospel, hear this.”

Where is the good news on Good Friday? Where do we see glimpses of goodness within an awful, brutal story? In the fury of drawn swords, which resulted in an ear being chopped off, Jesus exclaims, “no more!” Jesus stopped the violence and heals the ear symbolizing that the hurt caused in every broken relationship will be healed and that every relationship will be made whole. Jesus uses his final breaths to proclaim forgiveness for those who have crucified him. Grace, mercy, and forgiveness for everyone. Jesus is stripped of all decency

and humanity, yet his actions reveal the good news of a peaceful God. Meanwhile, the actions of others around Jesus, the betrayals, mocking, derision, mob mentality, and violence, reveal who we are at our worst. The Passion narrative tears down any facade. Everything is revealed in this moment, for better and for worse. The good news is Jesus' ministry is not defeated by death. All will be healed, mended, made whole, and resurrected. Jesus' nonviolent resistance on the journey to the cross provides the most compelling model for love of our enemies. Jesus' death reveals the heart of a God of love who refuses retaliation in the face of horrific violence.

Pastor Briain Blount wrote: "The Son of Man is on a mission, to resist the powers, human and otherwise, that foment injustice and tolerate brokenness. Consistently, defiantly, furiously, but always nonviolently, Jesus challenged laws and traditions that were treated as more important than delivering wholeness, healing, and liberation to shattered human lives. Jesus reminds us that we fight with words, ideas, and vision. We are to show care for the oppressor as we partner with God in overturning systems of oppression. Dying on the cross, Jesus reinforces God's message of nonviolent resistance in the most heartbreaking of ways. As the authorities crucify Jesus for proclaiming liberation for all people. Jesus forgives them. Jesus transforms with love. Our calling is to go and do likewise. Love consistently, defiantly, furiously, nonviolently, whenever and wherever, we encounter brokenness, injustice, and oppression. To do otherwise is to betray everything for which Jesus lived, died" and lives again."

Love can be devoid of the feeling of love and yet be love in action. You may not be able to feel love for your enemy. Love is refusing to hate. Love refuses fear, cynicism, and contempt. Love is refraining from retaliation. Love is doing something to deescalate. Love for enemy is even the smallest positive action. Love keeps us human. God will add to that love, grow that love and eventually we will feel love for our enemies. Easter good news is the end of oppression, inequality, captivity, slavery, violence, suffering, and death.

"Love and Love and Love Again"

a poem by Sarah Speed

"If you back a human into a corner, we will raise our fists, raise our voices, throw words of hate in your direction. But when we backed Jesus into a corner, Jesus said, Forgive them, for they know not what they do. Jesus turned and looked at Peter and Judas, love in his eyes. Jesus offered grace to the criminal hanging beside him. When we backed Jesus into a corner, he loved and loved and loved again. In this war-torn world, we could do the same. We could ground the bomber planes, empty the gun cartridges, unclench our fists, soften our jaws. They say it cannot be done, but do not believe them. In this war-torn world, we could try, love and love and love again."

Death cannot stop the good news. A reading from the good news of Matthew: **Matthew 28:1-10 NLT**  
**"Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb. Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. The angel's face shone like lightning, and their clothing was as white as snow. The guards shook with fear when they saw the angel and they fell into a dead faint. Then the angel spoke to the women. "Do not be afraid!" The angel said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. Jesus is not here! Jesus is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying. And now, go quickly and tell his disciples that Jesus has risen from the dead, and Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see Jesus there. Remember what I have told you." The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy and they rushed to give the disciples the angel's message. And as they went, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they ran to Jesus, grasped his feet, and worshiped God. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid! Go tell my siblings to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there."**

Death cannot stop the good news. It is alive, unbound, and wild in the world. Like the mustard seed, good news grows without limit. Like water turned into wine, good news surprises us with joy. Like loaves of bread, good news expands to feed each hungry soul. And now, even in the face of death, good news will not be buried or silenced. The resurrected Jesus says to the women, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my siblings they will see me." As we celebrate the good news of Easter, let us also go seeking Jesus in the faces of neighbors and strangers, and in the good works that are alive in this world.

The good news of Matthew emphasizes the seismic shift occurring, the resurrection is loud, astonishing, even a little fearful. Resurrection is spreading. Everyone is invited to share the good news. Where do you see the good news of the resurrection coming to life? What good news is alive in you? What is creating, dancing, and moving in the world? The good news is more than an empty tomb, more than Jesus' resurrection, more than the resurrected Jesus present with us always, more than our resurrection in the future. The good news is alive today transforming the entire cosmos into glorious goodness, bringing heaven to earth. The good news is you are invited to partner with God in transforming all to glory.

Pastor Lizzie McManus-Dail wrote: "Jesus is alive and death is vanquished, except, of course, the ones who killed Jesus are also here. Jesus says: "Do not be afraid," because they are afraid because the people who scorned Jesus are still here, too. The soldiers who mocked him. Pontius Pilate still reigns. How can we trust resurrection when death is on the world's throne? Because Jesus knows what we will always need to be reminded of: the good news is greater than any tyrant. The good news of God is more alive than anything that tries to kill God, more alive than anything that tries to kill the image of God in all of us. Kings come and kings go and we may tremble still, but God? God shakes the earth with power and might so tender and so fresh it can make a tomb bloom with new life. Alleluia!"

The first evangelists go quickly with "fear and great joy." How will you embody the good news? Where do you see the good news coming alive in subversive and surprising ways today?

Pastor John Gable preached an Easter sermon entitled "Already and Not Yet," proclaiming. "God confronted all the forces of evil that seek to defeat and destroy us. On Good Friday when the nails were driven in to Jesus' hands and the sky turned black it looked as though all was lost and evil had won the day. But on Easter, God claimed victory over the powers of sin and death by raising Jesus from the dead. Easter is the decisive event. Without question the battle rages on against sin, warfare, greed, prejudice, and injustice in our world, but let us not lose hope because God's victory is assured. We still struggle in a world where sin and death are painful realities, where violence and hatred prevail, where division and discord seem to win the day; against these we must always contend and contend we must because we know how this story ends! The cross and resurrection of Jesus become our rallying point because God has broken the power of sin and death rendering them helpless. The powers of darkness have lost their influence; they are as a barking dog, chained to a post, who has no teeth. Let them bark!"

On Easter, Pope Francis preached: "Christ is risen, Jesus is alive! Jesus is no longer a prisoner of death, Jesus is no longer wrapped in the shroud and therefore we cannot confine Jesus to a fairy tale, we cannot make Jesus a hero of the ancient world or think of Jesus as a statue in a museum! On the contrary, we must look for Jesus. We must take action: look for Jesus in life, in the faces of our siblings, in everyday business, look for Jesus everywhere except in the tomb. We must look for Jesus without ceasing. Because Jesus has risen from the dead. Jesus is present everywhere. Jesus dwells among us. Jesus hides and reveals even today in the siblings we meet along the way, in the most ordinary and unpredictable situations of our lives. Jesus is alive and is with us always, shedding the tears of those who suffer and adding to the beauty of life through the small acts of love carried out by each of us."

#### "Birdsong"

*a poem by Sarah Speed*

"Every morning the sun rises, majestic and steady. She is greeted in all her strength with the joyous cacophony of birdsong. I like to believe this holy chorus is the birds telling each other, I am here. We made it through the night. You are not alone. What good, good news. I think the resurrection is a bit like that. God is here. We made it through the night. We are not alone. What good, good news.

Jesus is saving, healing, redeeming, resurrecting here and now. Jesus is ahead of us guiding us into the glory of the good news fully manifest. God has defeated death. The good news is universally flourishing. Rejoice, and share the good news! The good news is alive! Amen



