

Natalie W. Bell  
 April 1, 2018  
 Easter

***This Changed Everything!***  
***John 20:1-18***

*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. <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. <sup>4</sup> The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup> and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup> for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples returned to their homes.*

***Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene***

*<sup>11</sup> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look<sup>[a]</sup> into the tomb; <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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." <sup>14</sup> When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew,<sup>[b]</sup> "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup> 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.'" <sup>18</sup> 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.*

Ever gotten one of those *scam emails or Facebook messages* from someone on the other side of the globe, asking you for money?  
What do you usually do with that?  
If you're like me, you hit *delete*. Really fast.  
Like, probably before I even read it all.....

Well, one guy named Ben Taylor in Utah decided to *play along...*  
and it completely *changed* his life!  
Some of you may have seen this story on the news this week.

One day Ben received a FB message from a stranger named **Joel Willie** in Liberia, West Africa, that read: *"My name is Joel from Liberia, West Africa. I need some assistance from you. Business or financial assistance dat will help empower me."*

But instead of ignoring it,  
or telling the guy to try someone else,  
Ben said, *how can I help?*

Now in all honesty, Ben had received messages like this before,  
and he was cynical.

Ben said, *"So when I got it, I just figured here's another one of those scams, and so I wanted to teach them a lesson, because you don't just mess with people and get away with it."*

So, Ben wrote back with a *lie*.  
He told Joel he was in the *photography* business,  
and if Joel wanted to be his business partner,  
he should go around Liberia and take pretty pictures.  
He never expected Joel would actually do it.

Ahh, but Joel said he *would do it!*  
So, Ben mailed him a *camera!*  
And Joel sent back *pictures*—beautiful, inspiring pictures.

And then Ben's life started to change.  
He saw Joel as a *real guy, living in poverty*, trying to raise 7 kids.  
So he decided to make a collection of the photos into small *books*,

and **sell them online** to whomever was interested in helping Joel.

The book is called "*By D Grace of God*"  
And it has sold over 5,000 copies!

Ben sent over \$1000 to Joel, far more than a year's wages.  
And he asked Joel to use \$500 to help others,  
never expecting him to do it.

But that's **exactly what Joel did**.

He gave school supplies to students at 5 different schools in a local village.  
And took—you guessed it, **pictures**.

**Beautiful, inspiring pictures.**

You can find the story on [cbsnews.com](http://cbsnews.com).

It's amazing.

**Joel lives** like other Liberians, on less than \$2 a day, supporting seven children.

But now, with the help of Ben, who **traveled** over 5,000 miles to Liberia to meet Joel, now they have a true friendship, and a business—to help the poorest of the poor in West Africa.

Both of their lives were **completely transformed** by a simple, random Facebook message.

It could have easily been **overlooked, or ignored**.

Instead lives were **transformed**.

Ben's cynicism changed to **joy** through giving and helping a complete stranger.

Joel says I have come from "**being a zero to a hero**".

By Steve Hartman at [www.cbsnews.com](http://www.cbsnews.com), March 30, 2018

I love that story.

Their journey **changed their lives**.

And the lives of **countless others** as well!

It transformed families in Liberia blessed by their generosity,  
and everyone who has seen this amazing story on  
CBS's segment, **On the Road with Steve Hartman**,  
including me.

All from one little Facebook message.

You know, it got me thinking about the Easter story.  
Every year, it's the **same wonderful story**, from John 20,  
the story of the empty tomb.

Many of us feel like we know it **by heart**.  
So, it can **easily lose it's power** because we are so familiar with it.  
I think it might even be possible to celebrate Easter,  
**overlooking or even ignoring** the power of this story.

But the truth is, it's a **radical** story.  
It's **life-changing**.  
This story of Jesus' resurrection---**it changed everything**.  
**Everything**.

It changed everything in the course of **human history**.  
It changed everything for the **followers** of Jesus then,  
and everything for all of His followers **ever since!**

It has changed everything for **US**,  
if we take the time to really **hear** it,  
and **know what it means** for our lives today.  
If we take the time to let it be **real** to us,  
if we let it grow our **relationship** with Jesus.

Because, this is not just a famous Bible story.  
And it's not just a familiar story.

And it's **not about** Easter bunnies,  
chocolate, fancy clothes and dinners, egg hunts,  
or any of the other usual fun and fanfare that we enjoy on this day.

This story **changes everything**.  
**Without this**,  
I'd be all in for the chocolate bunnies,  
but not willing to stand up here and preach each week,  
or devote my whole life to ministry.  
Without this, I don't know that **you'd want to give up** a perfectly comfortable  
Sunday morning to be at church with the body of Christ,

when you could be doing any number of other fun things!  
Without this, I don't know that any of us  
could really ***make it through life*** very well.

Because life is a mess, and ***we need this story.***  
It's ***not easy out there***, is it?

***Joel*** from Liberia he knows—raising seven children on less than \$800 a year.  
***Families*** whose kids depend upon school breakfast and lunch—they know.  
People who will be celebrating Easter with an ***empty seat*** at the table—you  
know, don't you?

Those with the ***loss*** of loved ones, ***prodigal*** kids,  
strained ***friendships*** or ***difficult*** relationships,  
Those struggling with ***grief, or addiction, or pain, or other challenges,***  
we all know, don't we?

***We ALL know about real life.***

We know what it is to be ***weeping***, just like Mary, on that first Easter morning.  
Which is why we need this story.

And I think that we all have these '***frames of reference***' to get through life.  
It's the way we ***make sense*** of the stories we hear.

Kind of like the way we ignore scam emails and FB messages!

We all have these ways that we ***expect life to work—boxes*** we want to fit our  
lives into, right?

I was talking to my husband Ed on a date this Friday—  
because six years ago we started dating,  
which seems like such a milestone, but you know what?  
***Not exactly what I had in mind*** for my life at 45!

At 22 ***I didn't expect*** to ever be divorced,  
or to have fewer than six kids,  
or to be living in Oklahoma again.  
So much for expectations, right?

Ed said, I guess ***I just expected my life to be like my parents—***  
their good life, their good marriage,  
and it hasn't been what I expected.  
It didn't fit the box I thought my life was going to fit.

Can't you *relate*?

How many of us can say the *very same thing*?

How many of us can say—we *never expected* to be where we are today, right?

Actually how many of us would say we *never expected to survive*,  
and make it to this day, right?

***Life is hard when it doesn't fit into the box, right?***

I was reading the Presbyterian Outlook this week,  
and they were talking about our '**frames**' for life.  
Those **boxes** we like to put everything in.

A pastor mentioned linguist George Lakoff, who was quoted in David John Seel, Jr.'s book, "*The New Copernicans*". Lakoff says,  
***"People think in frames ... . To be accepted, the truth must fit people's frame. If facts do not fit the frame, the frame stays and facts bounce off."***

David John Seel, Jr. *The New Copernicans: Millennials and the Survival of the Church*, Nelson: 2018.

Wow.

That really *makes sense* to me.

We do *try to fit everything* into a box, a frame,  
even if it's all just falling out over the sides, right?

The **followers** of Jesus did the very same thing.  
They heard him say he was going to die, and be raised,  
but they had **no frame of reference** for that latter part.  
They **SAW** him die.  
They **assumed** Jesus was dead.  
End of story.

When the **women** (and it was women in each gospel)  
came to the tomb on Easter morning,  
it is to anoint or honor **a dead body, not a living person**.

Jill Duffield of the Presbyterian Outlook writes:

***If you are coming to anoint a dead body, news of a living person does not fit the frame.*** Jill Duffield, *Presbyterian Outlook*, March 26, 2018.

Now that's an **understatement**, right?

I think this idea of Jesus resurrection '**reframing**' *our lives* is really powerful. Because we all have these frames.

It's probably one reason our nation is *so divided* right now. We've got our Republican or Democrat, conservative or liberal, evangelical or progressive '**frames**'.....  
**and when life doesn't fit in those, well, the frame stays, and the facts tend to bounce off.**  
 Yikes, right?

What if what we see in the **resurrection** of Jesus is a **re-framing**? Which is radical, and revolutionary, and downright awesome, isn't it?

It's good news that reframing **is even possible**, if you ask me! And it really makes sense when you think about it, doesn't it? I mean, **we can't actually fit God** into one particular 'box' or frame, right? God is bigger than all the boxes, greater than all the frames! However we frame God, God is greater, more mighty and far more awe-some!

And this resurrection of Jesus—it's the **ultimate re-framing!** Dead people do not come back to life! Yes, Jesus raised Lazarus—but that was a resuscitation. Lazarus did eventually die, like all people do.

But Jesus—he died, and then—3 days later—**he was ALIVE. Resurrected.** Made **new**.

**So new, that Mary doesn't** even recognize him at first, She's got her frame of reference and thinking that with this empty tomb, and empty grave clothes, and Peter and John running in and out and back home... that someone has simply **stolen** His body. That's the **frame**, right?

But isn't the resurrected Jesus **beyond** all boxes? **Outside** all frames?

The resurrected Jesus, the living Lord and Savior, is **loose!**  
 Watch out my friends,  
 Because this is the story we need to hear at Easter!

This is **WAY better** than bunnies, eggs, fancy clothes, ham for dinner,  
 and even, yes, even chocolate!

No joke, this is life-changing.  
 This is news to **help you get up** in the morning.  
 This is news to help you **make it through** your worst week,  
 your darkest hour.  
**Because Jesus, my friends, is alive.**

He is resurrected.  
 He is risen, as we say on Easter.  
**He is risen indeed!**

Doesn't that mean we can **get rid** of our boxes?  
 And throw out the frames?  
 And let our lives take on **new shape and meaning**—all by the grace of God!

It starts when Jesus celebrates that **Last Supper**,  
 When he washes their **feet**, and says,  
 now **love one another** as I have loved you.

And then on **Good Friday, on the cross**,  
 Jesus dies --to take away our sins.  
 Not easy to understand,  
 but the message is actually so simple, that kids know it by heart.

We see the **ultimate love of God** on the cross when Jesus dies.  
 He humbled himself, to take away our humiliation.  
 He was crucified, that we might be set free from sin.  
**He died, that we might live.**

It's **amazing** what he did on Good Friday.  
 Dying—as an innocent man—as the Son of God.  
 Talk about knowing **what we go through** here on earth.

Talk about enduring ***hell on earth***.

***Jesus did that—for you, for me.***

He really died, so that the ***power of sin and death would be defeated—***  
forever!

Sure, ***we still sin***, and ***we still suffer*** the consequences,  
but we are ***covered by the amazing grace*** of God!

His death means we can have ***new and clean hearts***.

His death means ***I can keep on going***,

no matter how much I screw up,

I can ***start again***.

His death means that ***I can get up*** in the morning,  
because no matter how much I lose or suffer in this life,

***I have hope---***

***Because my Savior is alive! Right beside me, every day!***

Jesus' death is not the end of the story.

It's not the final frame.

There's an ***empty tomb***.

That's the ***real story*** of Easter.

***No tomb, no box, no frame*** can hold the power of God.

Death could not hold him.

He is risen!

And he lives to share ***new life with each and every one of us, today!***

***And one day—there will be, no more death, no more tears, no more pain.***

***Eternal new life.***

And this resurrection and new life, it's not just ***in theory!***

Easter is ***not*** about just ***believing*** up here (head) that Jesus was resurrected.

Yes, of course, I believe that he was.

Some people don't,

but I think it's a ***leap of faith that we take*** as Christians.

But it's ***not just believing*** in the resurrection up here (head).

The question of Easter is not just

***do you believe that the resurrection happened?***

The question is really—*do you know the ONE who was resurrected?*

Do you know this *living, loving Lord and Savior*,  
 who brings you *good news, and grace, and new life?*  
 Do you know the *power* of resurrection—in your life?  
 And, Have you heard him calling *YOUR name?*

Because just like Mary discovered,  
 when that supposed gardener said her name,  
 we also have Jesus calling us by name today!  
*Did you know that?*  
*Jesus calls you by name today!*

You know what makes memorials and vigils and services of remembrance  
 so *meaningful* for the families of the victims, the deceased, and the fallen?  
 It's when you say their *NAME*.

It's not the same to hold a memorial and just talk in generalities  
 about nice people.  
 You have to say their *NAME*.  
 It's not the same to hold a vigil for the victims of a violent crime—  
 unless you say their *names*.  
 It's not the same to mourn the loss  
 of soldiers, or police officers, or firefighters in the line of duty—  
 unless you say their *names*.

Names are *meaningful*.  
 Because we all have a name!  
 It's one reason I try to picture your name in writing, to remember it, to call  
 you by your name.  
 I don't always succeed, but I sure do try—because we all have a name, and it's  
 how we know who we are.  
*I am Natalie Bell.*

If Jesus came into this building and said  
 '*hey you—you, preacher up there, come here*',  
 it would not be the same as Jesus walking in and saying  
*Natalie Bell, come here.*  
 Natalie, I am here--for you.

Isn't this an awesome part of the Easter story?  
 Being called by name is special. It can be life-changing.  
 And we have a Savior who wants such a person relationship with us,  
 That ***He calls us by name.***

I want you to do something for me this morning.  
 It's more fun to hear a sermon if you get to respond, right?  
 (the correct answer is, right!)  
 So, will you look at someone near you ***call them by name?***  
 Now I know we don't know (or remember) the names of everyone around us.

So, find someone—look them in the eye and even if you've been friends for 50  
 years ***tell them your name.***  
 Say '***my name is...***'  
 Go ahead, I'll wait.

Now, here's the powerful part.  
 Jesus does call us by name today—in our prayers, our quiet times, our  
 meditations, our music and our solitude.

But mostly, ***Jesus talks to us through one another.***  
 It's one reason we come to church—to be with the rest of the body of Christ—  
 and hear Jesus talking to us through each other!

I'm going to borrow someone I know and show you what we're going to do.  
 Ed, can I borrow you a second?  
 Now that you know the name of someone near you in this sanctuary,  
 Please turn to them and say their name,  
 and then tell them Jesus is risen!

Like this, "***Ed, He is risen!***"  
 And Ed will say "***Natalie, He is risen!***"

Now you guys try this.  
 And you can do it for more than one person, make sure no one is left out!

Friends, you have now *walked in the footsteps of Mary* Magdalene,  
the first preacher of the gospel!

*You have shared the good news* of Easter!

And you have heard it shared with you.

He is risen, and *this changes everything!*

May we hear him calling us by *name*,

And welcome a relationship with him into our hearts.

And may we do it all through the *power of resurrection and new life*,

And to that *all of God's people say, Amen!*