

Natalie W. Bell  
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 Easter Sunday

***Unafraid***  
***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. <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.*

This story is so familiar, and yet each year I see **something NEW** in it!

The word of God really is **living and active!**

One of the things I’ve always noticed is that the story begins in the **DARK**, and how strange that would be today.

What if Easter worship was *quiet, and in the dark?*

We celebrate Easter with triumphant music, colorful clothes and banners, but it actually all started *quietly, while it was still dark.*

This year I saw something *NEW and amazing*—

Do you realize *WHERE* this story happened?

In a *Garden.*

In John 19:40 it says: *They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.* <sup>41</sup> *Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid.* <sup>42</sup> *And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.*

What do we know about *Gardens in the Bible?*

In Genesis we learn that all humanity, and our relationship with God, started in one ---The Garden of Eden.

It's no coincidence that John *connects* the resurrection story, with the Creation story and the Garden of Eden.

*Why?*

Because, this is the beginning of a *New Creation.*

The resurrection of Jesus is a *starting point.*

It is NOT the end of the story of Jesus, or us--

for we are awaiting that day when we too are resurrected.

No this story is a *new beginning, a starting point* for us!

This is about new life, new birth, new creation—

For the resurrected Jesus, the all the believers who will be resurrected too!

Remember what happens *after this encounter* with Mary?

Jesus appears to, and *breathes* on his disciples to give them the Holy Spirit.

And that Spirit creates the body of Christ, *AKA the Church.*

That powerful story of Pentecost in Acts 2, is coming in just a few weeks!

So His resurrection is the beginning of a new story!

The Gospel of John begins with the words of Genesis 1: *In the beginning.*

And today, in this new beginning, Jesus is in a Garden with Mary Magdalene,

Just like God was in the Garden with Adam and Eve!

We know how Eden turned out.....

but today we have a clue about *how it will ALL be made right!*

Isn't it amazing how **God weaves** the story of creation, salvation and resurrection—together?

It's a reminder to us, that **all creation** will be redeemed and resurrected. Paul makes that clear in Romans 8:18-23:

*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the eternal glory about to be revealed ... We know that the **whole creation** has been groaning in labor pains until now; <sup>23</sup> and not only the creation, but we ourselves, ..groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.*

*Isn't that wonderful?*

We find resurrection and new eternal life,  
And so does creation!

Talk about great news, right?

Think of how **messy** our world is, we **know** it needs to be made new!

So when Jesus preaches about the kingdom of God,  
he is announcing **a new way of life** here on earth,  
that continues all the way into eternity.

This is what Easter is about—**new beginnings and new life**.

It's about a chance to start over, no matter who we are or what we've done!

But it's **not always easy** to live out this new life, is it?

Life is hard, and we often find ourselves **worried and afraid**.

All throughout Lent we've been reading  
Adam Hamilton's great book, **Unafraid**,  
and talking about the FEARS that so often control our lives:  
Fear of failure, loneliness, change, aging, illness,  
The fear of people who are different.

And we've talked a lot about how our media, **capitalizes and exploits** our fears,  
leading us to be even **more fearful**, and anxious.

Like, did you know there are over 80 drug commercials

On TV per hour in America?

encouraging us to talk to our doctor about the latest,  
greatest drug (despite the fact that the side effects sound worse  
than the disease, you know? )

We can see or hear ANY news, and find something *frightening*, and people who are stoking the flames of fear and anxiety, right?

Ours is a *fearful, anxious* world.  
But that does *NOT have to be* our story!

Because we have Jesus—the one takes *away our fears*,  
the one who said I am the way, the truth and the life.  
I am the bread of life, the light of the world.  
I am the Good Shepherd, I know my own and my own know me.  
They know my voice and I call them by name. (John 10)

That’s something else incredible about this story---Jesus calls Mary *by name*.  
And *that’s how she knows* it is Jesus.

What if this is *God’s call on Mary’s life*?  
Remember how God called Moses’ name, from a burning bush?  
Or Samuel, in the middle of the night?  
Or Jeremiah, or Isaiah... Or Jesus when he called the disciples?

God loves to *call us by name*.  
Have you ever heard God calling your name?  
Can you imagine that, right now---Jesus saying *your name*!  
I believe God does that for us---Jesus still calls us each of us by name.

And you know what Mary does *in response*?  
She calls Jesus by name—*Rabbouni*, which means ‘My teacher’.

Jesus has already said in John 10 that he is the Good Shepherd,  
who *calls his sheep by name*.  
And here he is doing that---Calling Mary by name.  
Just like He does for us.

Using someone’s name is pretty *important*, isn’t it?  
It’s meaningful, when someone knows your name, right?  
(And so frustrating when they don’t’!)  
It’s not enough for us to just refer to each other as ‘hey you’,  
We *want, and need, to know* one another by name.  
True relationships are built on that *identity*.

Mary, Rabbouni....names are important,  
 whether they are our *legal* name,  
*or a name of affection.*

We all have relationships where we use a *beloved nickname*, right?

My *Papa* (his nickname) used to call everyone a nickname,  
 by spelling their first name *backwards*.

I was Tan. Mom was Map. My little brother, Darb. ....you get the drift.  
 Just don't go trying to do this with places, like Tulsa...

Using a beloved name is what's happening here,  
 Did you notice she does NOT call Him Jesus?  
 She says *Rabbouni*--- *my* teacher. It's so personal.

This calling of Mary by name, is the *beginning of her new life*.  
 She will become the *first female preacher*!

Did you know that?

She is literally the first person to preach Jesus' resurrection  
 to the other disciples!

The first person to preach the Good News—that Jesus is alive!  
 And this is true in *ALL the Gospels*---it's women who first  
 preach the resurrection story!

And what does she say to the others? She says, "*I have seen the Lord*"!

Guess what people said when Jesus was calling his disciples?

They said, "*Come and See*".

Guess what the woman at the well said, after Jesus read her mind and her life?  
 she goes into town and says "*Come and see,*  
 a man who told me everything about myself!"

When we encounter Jesus, *we want others to come and see*, don't we?

Come and see this devotional, this inspiring message....

Come and see what Jesus has done for me—He can do it for you too!

Did you know that's how 80% of people come into a church, and stay?

Through a personal invitation to *Come and See*!

This is the way Jesus works-- *face to face*, transforming lives!

And this Easter story is incredible—because they saw him die,

And now he is alive??

He is not resuscitated like Lazarus—he is ALIVE.

*With a new body*, but it is still Jesus.  
You can see His *scars*, but he is *made new*.

Adam Hamilton, in his book, *Unafraid*,  
compares the resurrected body to getting *new cell phone*.  
Now, stay with me--this is not a bad comparison.  
When you get a new cell phone, like I did days ago,  
most of our info is backed up online,  
so we get a new exterior phone, but inside—it's still us.  
With all our info, contacts, pictures....

Paul speaks of this resurrected and *immortal body* in 1 Corinthians 15,  
Our new body will be *new, but still us inside*.  
This is important, because Christians believe in a *bodily* resurrection,  
not souls leaving the body for heaven.

C.S. Lewis wrote about this newness in his book, *The Great Divorce*.  
It's about a bus ride from hell to heaven,  
and how people respond when given a chance to stay in heaven.

Lewis firmly believed that what we believe about heaven,  
*affects the way we live* today!  
Is that true for *you*?  
What *do you believe* about heaven? About resurrection?  
Does the resurrection *give you hope---for TODAY?*  
It sure does me.

The Bible has so much to say about this:  
In **John 11** Jesus says "*I am the Resurrection and the Life,  
those who believe in me, though they die, yet shall they live*".  
In **John 14** He says, "*In my Father's House are many rooms,  
if it were not so would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?  
And when I go, I will come again and take you to me*".

In **2 Cor 4:16-17** Paul says, *So we do not lose heart.  
Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed  
day by day.* <sup>17</sup> *For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal  
weight of glory....*

We know that in heaven things are perfect,  
 In **Isaiah 2:4** it says people *will beat their swords into plowshares,*  
*and study war no more.*

**Isaiah 11:6** says, *a lion will lie down with the lamb, and a child will lead them.*

**Hebrews 12** describes the people in heaven as a *'cloud of witnesses' cheering us on as we run the race of life!*

Jesus says in **Matthew 22** *"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.*

Ever been to a big extravagant wedding reception?

Jesus says heaven is like that!

At the end of the Bible, Revelation 21 describes a new heaven and earth:

*Then I saw **a new heaven and a new earth**; ...And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,*

*"See, the home<sup>[a]</sup> of God is among mortals.*

*He will dwell<sup>[b]</sup> with them;*

*they will be his peoples,<sup>[c]</sup>*

*and **God himself will be with them,**<sup>[d]</sup>*

*<sup>4</sup> he will wipe every tear from their eyes.*

***Death will be no more;***

***mourning and crying and pain will be no more,***

*for the first things have passed away."*

*<sup>5</sup> And the one who was seated on the throne said,*

*"See, I am making **all things new.**"*

That's why we're here today---death is not the end.

**Death and evil DO NOT WIN! Jesus is the victor!**

It's why we shout *Alleluia* today--for new life—now and forever!

Adam Hamilton uses an old story of **a doctor and his dog** to describe our desire for heaven. One day a doctor was making a house call to a new patient.

He left his dog waiting outside on the front porch.

And as he was examining the patient, the man said

*"Should I afraid of dying? "what is heaven like?"*

The doctor said—do you hear that noise?

That's my dog, scratching at your front door.

He doesn't know you, he has no idea what your house is like, the only reason he is scratching at the door is because he knows that his Master is inside, and he wants *to be where his Master is*. Adam Hamilton, *Unafraid*, Convergent; New York, 2018, pg. 219

That's *heaven*.

Isn't that great?

We don't know exactly what heaven is like, but we want to be there, right?

*I WANT to be where Jesus is*, don't you?

We know that in heaven, everything is perfect,.

Hamilton says, *Heaven is where God's will is always done*.

Adam Hamilton, *Unafraid*, Convergent; New York, 2018, pg. 219

So today at Easter, we get all this *great news!*

We get a *fresh start, a new beginning* today—and forever!

Who doesn't need that?

Jesus calls us each by *name*. I sure want that!

And when we are resurrected—we get a *new body*, and a new life, in a place with no sorrow or pain.

Sign me up Jesus!

All throughout Lent, we've talked about facing our fears with FAITH.

That includes our FEAR of Death!

Hamilton has encouraged us to:

*Face fear with faith.*

*Examine the facts*

*Attack anxiety with Action*

*Release our fear to God!*

And today we celebrate the fact that **our hope is found in Jesus**.

In Jesus, we *see God*, and the *potential* for our lives!

This *hope is our antidote* to fear,

This *person is where we surrender* all fear.

We can live **UNAFRAID**.

The question is: *Will we? Will we turn to Jesus, and release those fears?*

In my favorite devotional, *Streams in the Desert*, it said this about Jesus:

*Your Guide will not keep to any beaten path.*

*He will lead you through ways you would never have dreamed....*

*He knows no fear, and he expects you to fear nothing while He is with you!*  
 From Streams in the Desert, L.B. Cowman, April 16<sup>th</sup>.

Don't we want that? Our fears to be taken away?  
 God sure wants it for us—Jesus and angels ALWAYS come, saying Do Not Fear!  
 Teresa sent me a poster with some different acronyms of F.E.A.R. recently:  
 One said: Fear Everything And Run,  
 the other said: Face Everything, And Rise

*Which do we want to do?*

There's a beautiful old hymn, called *Because He Lives*.  
 I love it, because it sums up the promise and power of Easter in just a few words.  
*Because He lives, I can face tomorrow,*  
*Because He lives, all fear is gone;*  
*Because I know He holds the future,*  
*And life is worth the living,*  
*Just because He lives!*

Friends, that is the *Good News of the Gospel this Easter!*  
 For this, we shout Alleluia  
 And all God's people say, AMEN!