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Easter

**Hope**  
**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.*

*2 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."*

*3 Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb.*

*4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.*

*5 He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.*

*6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there,*

*7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.*

*8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;*

*9 for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.*

*10 Then the disciples returned to their homes.*

*11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb;*

*12 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.*

*13 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."*

*14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.*

*15 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."*

*16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher).*

**17** 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.' "

**18** 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.

Did you know that there is no evidence of early Christianity **without the resurrection** of Jesus as a central belief?

Resurrection is that important to the story of our faith—it is **THE story**.

Some people refer to the **Gospels** as Easter accounts with prologues, because they were written,

looking back from the perspective of Christ's resurrection.

Did you know that in the **Gospel of John**,

the last hours of Jesus' life, and his resurrection appearances take up most of the Gospel?

Why is it so important?

**Why do we come here** all dressed up, with special music and liturgy, special hymns, decorations, lilies, food, and more?

Because Easter is not an end or a finale to Holy Week, when Jesus died on the cross.

It's because Easter is the **beginning of a new life**.

It happened on the **first day** of the week for a reason.

It is the first day of **new life** in Jesus Christ.

**Our** new life in Christ.

Easter is our source of **hope**.

When Mary sees Jesus and thinks he is the **gardener**, that is not an accident.

He is a gardener, he is meeting her in the garden outside the tomb, because he is about to give new life in all who follow Him!

The garden around the tomb reminds us of the Garden of Eden, where God brought Adam and Eve to life.

The resurrection of Jesus is a **new beginning, to a new story**.

To our story.

The story of our lives, as Christians.

**Last week** we heard about the end of Jesus' life—  
 the week that began with people shouting **Hosanna!** as he entered Jerusalem  
 on a donkey,  
 and ended with the crowds shouting **Crucify Him!**, and his death on the cross.  
 We heard about his **last supper** with his disciples,  
 when he took a towel and **washed** their feet,  
 when he gave them **bread and wine**, and said this is my body broken for you,  
 my blood shed for the forgiveness of sins.  
 When he told them he had a **new commandment** for them to follow—  
 to love one another, just as I have loved you.

And today we come to the story of the **empty tomb**.  
 Three days after the death of Jesus on the cross,  
 that's when Mary comes to the tomb to pay her respects  
 to her friend and Lord.  
 And she comes in the **darkness**...John says 'while it was still dark'....

That's where **Easter begins**.  
 In the dark.  
 Do you realize that?

We come here all dressed up, and ready to celebrate with the joyous music  
 and festivities of the whole day....  
 But the Easter story starts in **darkness**.  
 And not just any darkness.  
 Darkness in a **cemetery**.

We all know what kind of darkness that can be, right?  
 Even the kids know that.

A few weeks ago one of our younger kids had the most amazing answer when  
 I asked, when and where have you been **happy and sad all at the same time?**  
 And she said so sweetly, so innocently, '**in the graveyard**'.

Wow.  
 Isn't that the truth?  
 We go to bury our loved ones, and we cry tears of sorrow,  
 because they are gone,

but don't we often cry tears of happiness because we know that there is a resurrection for them, that they have gone to be with God?  
It's the ***Joy and Sorrow*** all rolled into one.

***Mary*** only knows the sorrow when she arrives that early morning. She arrives at the tomb, expecting to just mourn his loss. Instead she is shocked to find out that the stone has been rolled away, and his body is missing!

***Imagine*** going to the cemetery, and finding the gravestone or marker for your loved one, taken away. It would only compound your grief too, right?

So in her sorrow she alerts the disciples ***Peter and John***, and they come to see the empty tomb, but then they return home. We're not sure what they believed about the resurrection, but we know that Jesus would later that day appear to all the disciples in a locked upper room.

But that early morning, ***Mary is left all alone, weeping*** in the garden. As she wept, she saw two ***angels*** in the tomb where Jesus body should have been.

*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."*

**14** *When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.*

**15** *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."*

No matter who you are, we are ***all like Mary*** in so many ways. We grieve our own losses, and we ask the same questions, What's going on here? Why is this happening? Isn't there something I could do? That I could have done? And ***where is God?***

We come to our ***own graveyards***, real or symbolic, We come full of sorrow, defeated by the loss of those we love,

by the loss of dreams we have dreamed....

And in the ***middle*** of that grief, in the middle of our losses,  
that's when we ***understand*** Easter.

Because that's when ***Easter happened***.

It didn't happen in a decorated, music-filled sanctuary.

It ***wasn't announced*** with angels singing and the heavens rejoicing for all the earth to witness.

Isn't that strange?

Have you ever thought about that?

Jesus did jump up and say 'Ta-dah'!

He didn't make a big show coming out of the tomb!

Instead he quietly arose in the ***dark, on the first day*** of the week.

And he quietly appeared to Mary, asking her Why are you weeping?

And he very simply called her by name.

***Mary.***

That's when she knew it was Jesus.

She was so overcome with joy and surprise she reached out to hold onto him,  
and he had to tell her he had not yet ascended to God.

It was in the middle of a cemetery, in the early morning, while it was still dark,  
that ***Mary saw her risen Lord***.

It was there that she heard him say her name.

He ***met her*** in her grief and sorrow.

Just like ***Jesus meets us*** in the pain we experience today.

Easter ***happens in darkness***, my friends.

It happens at work or home, when we are all alone and struggling.

It happens in hospitals, in nursing homes,

in the middle of car crashes and accidents.

Easter happens in tragedy and natural disasters.

Easter happens ***wherever we find any kind of death....***

because that's where it's ***needed***.

In the presence of death resurrection is ***possible***,

Because only in the presence of death is resurrection ***necessary!***

***Where is that place for you*** right now?

Where do you ***need Jesus to meet you***, to call you by name?

I was reading about a **woman this week who suffered** two miscarriages in six months, and she came to church angry, and hurting, unable to pray anymore. On the outside she had it all together, she was going to work, going to church, showing up for all her responsibilities. She was after all the pastor.

But on the inside she was falling apart, and that Sunday she knelt down to pray at the front with others in need of prayer. And she heard herself **finally cry**. A deep, groaning cry.

And in that falling apart, was precisely when she **started to feel some new life**, some real hope. She **let out her grief, and let God come in**.

She says that she learned that when you finally fall apart, that's when you can see the **pieces of yourself**, and how God makes it new. There is a kind of **resurrection** that comes only through grief, Only through the honest **acceptance of losses** in our lives. The person who grieves before God has the opportunity to be resurrected by God, and given a new perspective on life and hope.

Ayanna Johnson Watkins. *The Christian Century*, March 29, 2017, pg. 20.

Does that mean that our grief **always turns to joy**?

**No**, life is a mess.

People and situations are broken this side of heaven.

We won't have that final relief til we meet God.

So what if grief itself is not the cure, or the path to joy?

What if it's a **place**?

A place where we can **meet God**,

just as Mary met Jesus in the garden outside the tomb.

A place where **God can call us by name**.

A place where God can offer us the **resurrection of our hearts and lives**, as we wait for the resurrection of our **bodies**.

When have you been **happy and sad** all at the same time?

For me, it's not just at cemeteries.

It's also at **Easter**.

Because Easter reminds me that there is **real and everlasting hope**.

And Easter reminds me of the **reason** I really need that hope.

Friends, **where do you need this hope** of resurrection and new life?

Beneath the dressy clothes, and Easter dinners, and egg hunts...

Where are you **grieving**?

Where are you facing any kind of **loss**?

Where have you practically **given up**?

Have you ever just **prayed and prayed** for someone you love,

Someone who is wayward, estranged?

Someone you hope will come back to you?

Or come back to God?

Have you ever prayed the **same prayers**, year after year after year?

I sure have.

And it **breaks your heart** every time you pray, right? —

Because at least for me, I'm not asking for something trivial,  
or ridiculous.

I'm asking for someone's life, I'm asking for someone's future.

Sometimes I feel like my own life is hanging in the balance.

If **you've ever** prayed the same prayers, over and over again,

If you've ever grieved because it seems like God could do something and  
chooses to do nothing,

Then **Easter is for you**.

The **hope** found in resurrection—it's for you.

If you've ever **grieved** a loss.

Then Easter is for you.

The **hope found only in the resurrection**—it's for you.

**Rick Warren**, the pastor of Saddleback Church and the author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, together with his wife, Kay, went through a devastating loss when their twenty-seven-year-old **son Matthew** took his own life after battling depression and mental illness for years.

About a year after this tragedy, Rick said,

"I've often been asked, 'How have you made it?  
How have you kept going in your pain?'  
And I've often replied, '**The answer is Easter.**'

".. the death and the burial and the resurrection of Jesus happened over three days. Friday was the day of suffering and pain and agony. Saturday was the day of doubt and confusion and misery. But *Easter*—that Sunday—was the day of **hope and joy and victory.**

"And here's the fact of life: you will **face these three days over and over** and over in your lifetime. And when you do, you'll find yourself asking—as I did—three fundamental questions.

Number one, 'What do I do in my days of pain?'

Two, 'How do I get through my days of doubt and confusion?'

Three, 'How do I get to the days of joy and victory?'

"The answer is Easter. **The answer ... is Easter.**"

Lee Strobel, *The Case for Hope* (Zondervan, 2015), pp. 56-57

If you ever ask yourself, **why does Easter matter?**

What's the **big deal** besides the nice clothes and food and music?

Easter matters because **our lives depend on it.** Literally.

Because it's what **helps us make it** through life during **loss,**

It's what helps us when life seems to be a complete **mess!**

On **Friday** Jesus died on the cross,

And on **Sunday** he was raised from death---

And you know what that **means?**

It means Jesus **defeated sin, and death!**

Forever.

We can't see it all this side of heaven, but we know,  
we believe that

All the sin and death we see in this world—it is **not the final answer.**

**Evil** doesn't ever win.

**Death** is never the end of the story.

**Sin and death have been defeated** in the cross and resurrection!

We have been given **forgiveness,** now and always.

And we have received an everlasting hope—

**Hope in new life.**

Hope that those gone before us are with God,  
and all of us with ***one day be there*** too.

We believe as Paul says in ***1 Corinthians 15***,  
that because Jesus was resurrected, we too will be resurrected!  
Not just as souls floating around in heaven,  
But as people—with perfect bodies—  
people who know our loved ones, and more.  
We'll be resurrected as ***perfect human beings***, just as God intended.

This Lenten season we studied the ***Apostle's Creed***, and part of that Creed  
says ***I believe in the resurrection of the body***.  
That IS what we believe—in our future resurrection, just like Jesus.

Easter is a ***message of hope***.  
You know sometimes how you feel such joy and happiness, you think—  
***I don't want this to ever end?***  
You know what?  
In heaven, it won't.  
It won't ever end.  
The ***joy will continue***.

Pastor Tim Keller says that on Easter he always tells his friends that don't  
believe in the resurrection, that ***they should***.  
He says: *Most of them care deeply about justice for the poor, alleviating hunger  
and disease, and caring for the environment. Yet many of them believe that the  
material world was caused by accident and that the world and everything in it  
will eventually simply burn up in the death of the sun. ... Why sacrifice for the  
needs of others if in the end nothing we do will make any difference? If the  
resurrection of Jesus happened, however, that means there's infinite hope and  
reason to pour ourselves out for the needs of the world.* Tim Keller, [The Reason for God](#)  
(Penguin Books, 2009), pp. 210

Isn't that hope?  
That we ***can and should work to make this world a better place***—  
Precisely because ***sin and death do not win!***  
Because evil and death are ***never the end*** of the story?  
If that's not hopeful, I don't know what is!

N.T. Wright has written:

*The message of the resurrection is that **this world matters!***

*That the injustices and pains of this present world must now be addressed with the news that healing, justice, and love have won.* . . . Tim Keller, [The Reason for God](#)

(Penguin Books, 2009), pp. 210

*Friends, that's what we believe—all the evil and pain of this world.*

*It does not win.*

*We can work for the good of the world because Jesus has defeated sin and death...and there is hope—because we have new life.*

Easter begins in **darkness**,

It begins with doubt and pain, sorrow and sadness.

It begins with wondering—where is God?

But Easter ends with **hope**.

It ends with Jesus meeting us **right where we are**.

It ends with us **saying with Mary Magdalene, I have seen the Lord!**

It ends with a lasting hope that can get us through **the day**,

A Hope that can get us through **this life**,

because we believe **Revelation 21** to be true:

*one day there will be a new heaven and new earth,*

*and God himself will be with us;*

**4** *he will wipe every tear from our eyes.*

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

*for the first things have passed away."*

*And Jesus will say, "see, I am making all things new."*

Isn't that the **Good News of the Gospel** today?

Easter may begin in darkness,

but it ends in **hope**.

Hope for you. Hope for me.

Hope for all of us.

Amen.