



Jesus: Death to New Life

Rev. Mark A. Medina
April 16, 2017 Easter Sunday

The scene on that third day after the death of Jesus was filled with bewilderment and uncertainty.

The thoughts of the faithful as they hid from the rest of the community were heavy with pain, loss and sorrow.

When Jesus said her name, "Mary" she finally recognized him. Her eyes and heart saw him through the pain and anguish of death. And with her own voice she pronounced to the disciples. "I have seen the Lord."

Yes, Mary had seen the Risen Lord with her own eyes and heart. This was and is the confirmation of Jesus breaking the bonds of death to give new life. Indeed, he is risen!

Friends, as Easter people, you and I gather this day to remember Jesus defeating death to give us new life. Our belief of the Lord's resurrection gives us a hope for life beyond death. This is a promise that our dear Lord gave to all his disciples. New life comes to those who believe in him as the Risen Lord.

There is a story about boy named Philip, who was born with Down Syndrome. "Little Philip attended a third-grade Sunday school class with several eight-year-old boys and girls. Typical of that age, the children did not readily accept Philip with his differences. But because of a creative teacher, they began to care about Philip and accept him as part of the group, though not fully.

"The Sunday of Easter the teacher brought L'eggs pantyhose containers, the kind that looked like large eggs. Each receiving one, the children were told to go outside on that lovely Spring day, find some symbol for new life, and put it in the egg-like container.

"Back in the classroom, they would share their new-life symbols, opening the containers one by one in surprise fashion. After running about the church property in wild confusion, the students returned to the classroom and placed the containers on the table. Surrounded by the children, the teacher began to open them one by one. After each one, whether a flower, butterfly, or leaf, the class would ooh and ahh.

Then one was opened, revealing nothing inside. The children exclaimed "That's stupid. That's not fair. Somebody didn't do their assignment."

Philip spoke up, "That's mine."

"Philip, you don't ever do things right!" One of the student's replied. "There's nothing there!"

“I did so do it,” Philip insisted. “I did do it. It’s empty. The tomb was empty!”

“Silence followed. From then on Philip became a full member of the class. He died not long afterward from an infection most children would have shrugged off. At the funeral, this class of eight-year-olds marched up to the altar not with flowers, but with their Sunday school teacher, each to lay on it an empty egg.”

Source unknown

Friends, at some point in our lives, we have had personal experiences in helping us to understand the promises of Jesus. The Brief Statement of Faith in the Presbyterian church (U.S.A.) affirms that “*In life and death we belong to God.*” Whether a person dies quite unexpected or tragically, dies after a long life or a few days old, dies in battle or in a terrorist attack, I believe that God takes care of all his children. God takes care of all His creations.

As a pastor, I have been by many people who are in the process of dying. Sitting by or standing by their bed as they begin to slip from this world into the next and to experience new life in God’s Kingdom.

As a son, I can remember the deaths of my Mother and Father, and all those feelings of grief and loss I had experienced.

My mother was placed on a ventilator back in September of 1990 after she had inhaled fluids into her lungs which then caused her heart to stop. Dad believed that she was in a worse state than before and he made the decision to take her off the ventilator. He believed that eternal life was a far better gift for her and she would be home with God

So the ventilator was removed and we waited for her last gasp of air but it did not come as we had expected.

I stayed with her throughout the night. As the morning dawned, sun rays flowed over the Sandia mountains and they pierced the darkness. I was reminded of the Easter morning when Jesus broke through the bonds of death to give new life.

Well, Mom quietly passed away in the arms of a nurse who was bathing her later in the morning. It was at that moment that she was released from the cares of this world as well as the body that was squeezing in against here. And she went home to be in the presence of her ever loving god. The day of her new life had arrived. She was free! She was Home! She was with God.

Yes, the tomb is empty! The gift of new life in the Risen Lord is for us to believe in no matter what happens in life. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! In faith, we believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

Last year, noted Presbyterian poet laureate, Ann Weems, died due to complications from a brain tumor. I knew her from one of the churches I served in St. Louis. She wrote many poems which were meant for use in worship, in personal devotions and in discussions. Some of her poems from her book, *Kneeling in Jerusalem*, were part of the Good Friday service last week.

At her funeral service, the pastor and personal friend of Ann’s shared an unpublished poem at the end of the meditation which speaks to us today as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. It is titled, ‘*My Demise*’ which she wrote in 2010.

***When you hear of my demise
don't believe a word of it!
Our god is the god of the living
and I am living still!
If it were not so
he would have told us!***

***Don't believe a word of it!
And whatever you do
please please please
don't eulogize me!***

***Gather instead for worship!
To celebrate god
who gives each of us life abundant!***

***Turn mourning into morning
turn tears into laughter!
Turn sadness into joy!
Turn somberness into celebration!***

***Remembering that Jesus is
the way, the truth, the life.***

***Gather to celebrate life with scripture and prayer
with jazz band with choirs, with pipers with dancing***

Follow with faithfulness the life you have been given!

***I left this earth in Alleluias
dancing with the angels of life
among the stars of God.***

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My dear brothers and sisters, the Lord is risen. There should be no doubt in our minds and hearts that Jesus brought joy in the morning. For indeed this is a special day. For sure, we as the Easter people believe in the Resurrected life of Jesus Christ and we are here to confirm that reality. He is the Risen Lord in our lives from this day forward.

I mentioned earlier about going to Romania to celebrate Easter. One of the celebrated as the Romanian orthodox Christians proclaim at Easter, "Christos Adevarat, Adevarat a Enviata." Which means, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Regardless of the language, we all know the Jesus Christ is risen.

Together we proclaim, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah! Amen! Jesus Christ is risen again.



EASTER

Supporting Scriptures:

JOHN 20:1-18 NRSV

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 towards 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 he 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 round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, ‘**Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?**’ 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.’ 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.

ACTS 10:34-43 NRSV

Then Peter began to speak to them: ‘I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread

throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'