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Easter
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Everything Has Changed!
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^[a] 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,^[b] “**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.*

Everything changes when someone dies, doesn’t it?

And you never forget the moment you hear about the loss.

I can still see the color draining out of Ed’s face when he answered the phone that Sunday afternoon, I didn’t even have to ask what was wrong.

In middle school, my beloved **Grandpa** was sick,
and I remember at Easter feeling sick and worried,
and learning later that he had passed away at that time.
When my **Grandma Morene** left this life,
we were right there holding onto her,
telling her to go and be with her family.
And suddenly it was quiet.

Everything changes when a loved one is gone.

The dining room table has an empty chair,
The holidays are never the same,
Phone calls, cards, emails, are all suddenly missing.

You know these changes, don't you?

We can all recall life-changing moments of loss.

That's what it was like for Jesus' disciples.
Everything changed for them on that **Good Friday**.
The horrific scene on the cross,
the darkness that came over the land,
the removal of his body
and placing it in a borrowed tomb.

And everything changed **that Sunday morning**,
When Mary came and found the empty tomb in the darkness.
She wept the way we have wept,
with tears that you can almost hear as they pour out.

The **kind of tears** we cry at a cemetery,
or while leaving the hospital.
The kind of tears we cry after news from the doctor,
or a phone call of the unthinkable.
She cried the way we cry when **all hope seems lost, and God seems absent**.

Because **the empty tomb adds insult to injury**.

He was arrested, beaten, crucified, and now his body has been stolen?
What more could possibly go wrong?
How much more pain?

Everything changed that Easter morning, *but not the way we expect.*
 And *not the way Mary expected.*
 She expected despair, the loss of hope.
 She expected to grieve Jesus—
 three years of teaching, healing, and preaching.
 She expected to mourn this as an *ending.*
 She had no idea this was *just the beginning.*

So when she saw the empty tomb, *she feared more loss and sorrow,*
 The grief of a stolen body, not properly prepared for burial.
 Which is why 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.”

Everything changed with his next word: *Mary*
 and her response: *Rabbouni*, which means Teacher.

Everything changed again, at that moment—
 Suddenly there was *new life and new hope.*
 The kind of life and hope WE so desperately *need today—every single one of us.*

Because everything has changed all around us.
 Easter this year is totally different than last year!
 And honestly, life can feel like a *never-ending Good Friday*, right?
 We see up close the death and destruction in *Ukraine*—
 and it’s breaking our hearts.
 We see history repeating itself in unspeakable ways.

We’ve witnessed the ravages of *COVID* for two years—
 the loss of life, of livelihoods, of long-term health.

We’ve seen the destruction of *unity and civility*,
 As we are more divided than ever before—socially and politically.
 People don’t know what it means to ‘reach across the aisle’
 because the aisle is more like a chasm today.

We’ve seen the *loss of commitment to truth, and justice*,
 and instead we’ve elevated a notion of comfort and complacency.

We've lost a sense of *humility*,
 in a world that elevates pride and power,
 at all costs, even the loss of our very souls.

I once read a sign that said,
 'Everyone is carrying pain that you know nothing about'.

Isn't that true!

Everyone has experienced the pain of death, in some form or fashion,
 the death of a loved one, a beloved pet, the death of a dream,
 the death of a future, of a job, a relationship, or of health.

So we NEED the Good News of Easter—so desperately this year!

We need to know there's more than death, and loss, and destruction in this world.
 By the grace of God, there is real hope for *life—new life, eternal life*.

On that morning, Mary sees that hope, and she does what any of us would do
 If we saw a departed loved one again.

She reaches out for an embrace.

Jesus says 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.'"

In other words, Jesus is saying—**Everything has changed.**

There is **no going back** to the way things were before.

This is a whole new order, a whole new way of life.

In other words,

This is the new life promised by Jesus-- the **coming of the Holy Spirit**,

To be in us, and with us, to comfort us.

To guide us, remind us, and bring us joy.

Jesus is saying that the **only way to go now, is forward**,

Because nothing is the same.

Nothing is ever the same after death,

And nothing is the same after Easter.

Everything has changed, if we accept this story as **our story**,

And this truth as **our hope** for the future.

The good news of Easter is that **everything has changed—for good!**

You know, *many different traditions* in the Christian church *emphasize the resurrection* in their music, preaching and teaching, especially churches that are oppressed or marginalized.

Why?

Because resurrection takes on a much deeper meaning in the context of oppression, or in the face of pain and suffering.

So, how might a focus on resurrection help ALL of us in our suffering?

In all of our trials and pain?

It can make all the difference in the world.

The theology of resurrection is *powerful for everyone who follows Jesus Christ*.

We so often see the **CROSS** as the central symbol of our faith.

And it IS central to our faith, because without it, there is no empty tomb!

But the cross is the *gateway* to the **REST of the story**—it is the *pathway to the empty tomb!*

Jesus' resurrection is the *promise of OUR resurrection*, and the reason for OUR hope—now and for all eternity.

The **cross** is the symbol of our faith in Christ, but so is the *empty tomb!*

And the resurrection promise, is not just for us—*it's for ALL of creation*.

Paul says in Romans 8: *I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.* ¹⁹ *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God....* ²² *We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now;* ²³ *and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.*

Resurrection is for all of us, and all of creation!

It is *the firm foundation of our hope* as believers!

And, it's all about *a new heaven and new earth one day--*

Without pain, without suffering, without death.

That's what we believe about Jesus' death and resurrection—

we believe that he saved us,

and he conquered sin and death, forever.

We may live in the *in-between time before we see this fully realized*,
But it is coming, my friends.

John writes about it in ***Revelation Chapter 21:***

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² ...³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home^[a] of God is among mortals.

He will dwell^[b] with them;

they will be his peoples,^[c]

and God himself will be with them;^[d]

⁴ 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.”

⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said,

“See, I am making all things new.”

Some traditions embrace this talk of resurrection, heaven and eternal life.

Like many of our African American brothers and sisters.

Marvin McMickle writes about attending a Watchnight service at his church as a child.

Watchnight started on December 31, 1862,

when African Americans waited for the Emancipation Proclamation to go into effect the next day.

Marvin remembers that at 11:45pm, the pastor would start calling the names of church members who had died that year.

But ***he was puzzled*** when after each name was read aloud,

someone in the church would say,

“Thank you, Jesus, or ‘Bless the Lord’, or ‘It’s all right now’.

He thought people were being cruel, or glad that someone was finally gone!

When he returned to that church as an adult,

he understood the meaning of those responses.

They are ***words of hope.***

Hope, for new life, eternal life,

And they were ***followed by a song that united the congregation in hope,***

A song about the resurrection.

A song most of us know and can sing by heart right now:

Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home.

Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home.

I looked over Jordan, and what did I see, coming for to carry me home.

A band of angels, coming after me, coming for to carry me home.

Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home.

Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home.

If you get there before I do, coming for to carry me home,

Tell all my friends I'm coming too, coming for to carry me home.

Marvin McMickle, "But Early Sunday Morning", Journal for Preachers, Vol XLV, No. 3, Easter 2022, pg. 20-21.

Friends, hear the Good News of the Gospel.

Everything HAS changed.

He lives, so we can too.

Jesus' resurrection is the promise of ***our resurrection.***

His new life is ***our hope.***

And for the gift of our risen Lord, all God's people can say together, Amen.