

It is early on Sunday morning...
now the third day since Jesus's unimaginably cruel death.
Dawn has yet to break.

Jesus's disciples scattered on Thursday night... for fear of arrest.
Then came the news on Friday...
Jesus's trial... torture... and death.
By Saturday...
the first followers of Jesus
were hiding in the upper room in Jerusalem
where they had celebrated the Passover with their rabbi
just Thursday evening.

They were terrified of the might of the Roman Empire
which brutally crushed their hopes in Jesus as the Messiah
the Son of God... who had come to live among us.
During those interminably long hours... lost in grief...
the shock of the reality caught up with them.
This was no nightmare from which they could awaken.
Jesus was truly dead.

There are well-established facts that ground Easter in history.
We know that there was a man named Jesus
who developed a surprisingly persistent following
as well as we know that Caesar Augustus ruled the Roman Empire
when Jesus was born and that Tiberius Caesar was in charge
by the time Jesus died.
We have texts
by Roman and Jewish historians as well as the New Testament.
We also have archeological evidence attesting to all three people.
And we know Pontius Pilate in the same way:
through historical documents that show
he was placed in his position as governor by Tiberius.

Pontius Pilate's detachment in Jerusalem had already gotten far too much experience in crucifixion before Jesus of Nazareth entered the city with the crowds shouting "Hosanna."

Empowered by an angry mob calling for Jesus's death, Pontius Pilate ordered his soldiers to publicly torture and kill him.

Rome was skilled at dealing death to any threat to the way things worked.

Empires know how to kill, steal, and destroy. The reality we proclaim on Easter is that Jesus really died.

As our former presiding bishop Michael Curry succinctly stated it, ***"The Dude was dead. That's a fact."***

That the Jesus Movement persisted for centuries after his death is what is so highly unusual.

So here is the bold claim:

Just as real as his death and the grave is the fact of Jesus's bodily resurrection.

I make this bold claim for his actually dying and his truly bodily rising in light of the historical evidence that makes this plain.

But something happened on that Sunday following Jesus's crucifixion and death. That morning marks the hinge in human history.

Rowan Williams... former archbishop of canterbury was
about to board a train in a busy station in London

Suddenly... a loud alarm sounded.

A stern voice came over the PA system...

Everyone in the station must leave the building immediately. Most
people stopped... stood still... just looked at each other.

Visitors were heading for the exits...

While locals ignored the demand...

And hurried to their destinations.

The message only came once.

He looked at the person next to him...

They we shrugged their shoulders...

and went right through the barrier to catch their trains.

People can be quite stubborn when told

they ***must*** respond... or ***do*** something... or ***change*** behavior...

The same was true for Mary Magdalene...

She was exhausted by grief. With Jesus... ***everything*** died.

Who knows why she thought she was going to the garden
where the tomb they had borrowed for Jesus was situated?

Who knows why ***we*** do lots of things...

when we're worn out by life?

Mary's emotion represents the emotion of the whole world
in the presence of the overwhelming cruelty
and irreparable nature of death.

With Mary there are so many that weep.

In Syria mothers cry for their children and husbands.
In the Ukraine neighbors cry
because the future is precarious and dangerous.
In Rwanda tears are still shed each day
as the horror of genocide is remembered.

In this country, there is weeping in broken families,
in people ashamed to seek help from food banks,
or frightened by debt.
Asylum seekers weep with loneliness and missing far away families.

Mary continues to weep across the world.

This is the world we live in,
a world each of us has had a hand in creating.
A world of crosses.
We can comfort one another and treat the dying with dignity.
We can make gardens and graves,
we can move stones and wipe away tears.
But we can do nothing to defeat death.

But listen... hear the announcement...
The one who was dead, is now alive!
The one whose body had been a corpse...
lying motionless in the grave... inert... lifeless...
lying flat on a stone ledge in a borrowed tomb...
Now stands before Mary... speaking her name.

This day he speaks everyone's names
to ***engage them*** with the news... ***he is alive!***

When Mary hears her name spoken
she turns towards him.

A moment earlier and she was in the *deepest despair...*

A second later... her *life changed.*

Death has more than met its match.

It has been defeated.

Everything changes.

We cannot expel God, nor the life of God, from his world.

In fact... this new life *insists...*

There is *nowhere...* God is absent... powerless... or irrelevant...

There is no situation in the universe... God is at a loss.

The one that was dead is now alive.

Where there was weeping there is now joy.

Someone wrote

Joy might be a greater scandal than evil... suffering... or death.

This is what has moved Christian communities around the world
who face the most devastating of conditions.

Their certainty... that Jesus is alive...

enables them to face... all horrors. with joy.

Not happiness... but joy.

Joy can exist alongside mental illness... depression...

Bereavement... fear... because *the joy of Christ...*

comes from *knowing...*

Nothing... and no one less than God... has the last word.

After the attack on the church in Peshawar, Pakistan
Archbishop Williams asked how Christians were coping
with the fear that such attacks brought...

Had been anyone been in church the week following the attack?
Oh yes! There were three times as many people the next week.

Such a response is made possible... only by the resurrection.
The persecuted church... *flourishes* because of the resurrection.

Think of women who survived unspeakable sexual violence
yet lift their arms in prayer and praise to God.

Think of teenagers who have hope and joy
in lives that were dominated by self-hatred and harm.

This has only been made possible because Jesus is alive.

The announcement that Jesus is alive changes everything;
not simplistically or even instantly
do circumstances and situations change.

But it changes us.

It gives us hope where we were in despair...

faith where we were lost... light where we were in darkness

joy where we were entirely in sorrow.

That joy in the huge life of Jesus is present in the food banks...

Social work... Practical down to earth living...

that churches demonstrate across this country... across the world...

But Jesus hadn't finished with Mary yet.

It wasn't simply a personal thing for her.

She had to become a witness.

So Jesus sent her to the 'brothers' to tell them.

Please notice...

in all four gospels the first witnesses of the resurrection were women.

So Mary becomes the apostle to the apostles.

Jesus comes to find us all.

In all the gospels when anyone meets Jesus they are given a task.

The task is to join the announcement.

The meaning of our whole existence
is to be witnesses to the new life
that is offered by Jesus Christ.

The persecuted church bears witness in its joy overcoming fear
in worship in the midst of war... of refugee camps

In internment camps in Africa... the reminder that Jesus is alive...
was worth more than many sentences of comfort
for he brings joy.

The new life of Jesus is given to us.

We witness to it as we insist that money isn't our ruler,
that self-promotion isn't King
that pleasure isn't a fulfilling aim
and that the survival of the fittest
simply means some die later than others.

The new life of Christ has broken into our world
it cannot be contained... restricted... or managed.

The church exists to show by its life and work
the transforming power that has been set free in the world.
All we need to do... is respond in faith...
and receive the gift of that life.

To fail to respond
is like hearing someone crying ‘fire’
and continuing to walk into the building.

Or have someone whisper ‘will you marry me?’
and turn the channel to find something interesting to watch.
This is an announcement that calls our attention...
catches our lives... heals our brokenness...
and sends us out... with a purpose... a hope and a joy.
It is news that the world cannot ignore
that we cannot neglect
it is the news of joy immeasurable.

Jesus has always been about the work
of converting hearts and minds rather than overthrowing an empire.

Jesus never tried to establish a kingdom *without*
with an army and a palace, like other self-proclaimed Messiahs.

Jesus was establishing a kingdom *within*.
The occupying forces he sought to overtake
existed within the human heart.
The Jesus Movement still exists
because Jesus’s followers still feel his presence right here, right now.

That was the surprising truth his first followers discovered
after Jesus’s resurrection and later ascension: He was still with them.

He is still here. Now.

We routinely see
how God is *still* touching hearts and minds in that same way today.

People's lives continue to be changed for the better
by the power of the Holy Spirit in amazing ways
one can only call a miracle.

If you have yet to come to that sure and certain knowledge,
in your own life,
come back to worship again and again.

This is a place of resurrection, where love still conquers death.

Here, you can meet Jesus anew in worship,
surrounded by people whose lives are just as messy as yours.

We have a sure and certain hope built on seeing God show up.
Put your whole trust in Jesus
and you will come to share in Mary Magdalene's confident assertion:
"I have seen the Lord."

Amen.