

Easter Day 2018

John 20:1-18

Whoever you are,
Whatever you have done,
Whatever has happened to you,
Whatever brought you here today,
Now that you are here,
I invite you to make something of it.
Let it matter that you are here.

Let it matter that you are here
On the day we celebrate
The truth for which we scarcely dare to hope:
Love is stronger than death.

Death is real, and terrible,
And inescapable.
Nobody is going to try to tell you otherwise.
What we celebrate today
Is the mysterious truth
That though death is strong,
Love is stronger.

If you hope that is true,
But find it hard to believe,
Maybe start here,
With the story still echoing in our midst,
the story of Mary Magdalene in the garden.

Let her story be your story.

Forget the things you think you know about her
If they would keep you from claiming her story as your own.
Most of the things said about her are fake news,
Or false rumors.

Remember these things instead:
Mary Magdalene was Jesus' dearest friend.
She understood what he was talking about.
She understood who he was,
And experienced his power to heal and make whole.
With his help
She had been freed from some condition
Or perhaps behavior

That kept her isolated, hopeless, and trapped.
With his help
She had been set free,
Brought back into community,
Liberated from whatever had tied her in knots,
Free to listen, understand,
And share the message of Jesus,
The message of welcome, and acceptance,
Healing, and freedom.

Mary Magdalene was Jesus' dearest friend,
And she saw him betrayed, tortured, and killed.
She saw him laid to rest in a cold tomb,
With a stone rolled across the door.
All the new life, all the hope,
All the possibility went dark.

And so she went to weep beside the tomb,
Only to find that it was worse than she had known.
Even his body was gone.

Think, for a moment, if you are able,
Of the worst moments in your own life,
When all the light goes dark,
All the roads are closed,
When you are all alone.

This may be the place
Where you enter Mary Magdalene's story.
If you can, here and now.

And then, perhaps,
From that dark place that you share with her,
You might begin to wonder,
What does it look like
When the light returns,
When the face of a stranger
Yields to the voice of a friend,
And, though everything is completely different than it was,
Life is possible again.
This new life is not like the old life,
The life that died.
There is loss in that,
Loss that can't be taken away.
But bigger than the loss,
And more powerful,

Is the gift.

Mary Magdalene saw a stranger,
And knew him as her dearest friend.
She couldn't hold on to him;
But she could know that he was alive,
And would be with her forever.
Everything was changed.
Everything was alive again.

I don't know how this story of new life might be your story.
But I do know this:
I have seen this story come to life over and over
In those around me.
I have seen it unfolding in ways that seem small,
But echo for a lifetime.
I have seen it burst out
In dramatic change.
I know it can move quietly,
Hidden like an underground stream,
But showing in the life and growth
That flowers forth into the air.

There are endless ways this story of new life
Can happen here and now.
In your life,
In the lives of those around you,
In our communities,
For the planet.

There are endless ways we can know
The resurrection is real.

Here are three:

The journey of recovery,
The possibility of reconciliation,
The renewal of hope.

The journey of recovery,
From addiction,
Or trauma,
Is the story of resurrection.

The possibility of reconciliation,
After betrayal, or neglect,

Is the story of resurrection.

The renewal of hope,
When the way seems lost
Or all the roads are blocked,
Is the story of resurrection.

Maybe one of these stories
Has already happened in your life.
Maybe recovery has set you free.
Maybe reconciliation has restored a relationship.
Maybe hope has renewed your will to carry on.

Or maybe you are still waiting in the dark,
Waiting for the light to shine,
For a friend to call your name,
Waiting for a piece of good news
That you can hold, and keep,
And carry with you through the day.

If you are still waiting,
Let the story give you hope.
If you have found it to be true,
Let the story bring you joy.

If you believe this is possible,
Then share the news.
You don't need to tell the story of Mary Magdalene in the garden
Or use the word resurrection
To share the news that love is alive
And stronger than death.
You can tell your own story,
Or the stories of those you know and love.

Tell the stories of recovery,
Of reconciliation,
Of hope.

These are the stories that will keep the world alive.
These are the stories that prove the power of love.

These are the stories that let us know
The resurrection is real.

The story of the garden is beautiful,
And will last forever.

It is true.
And it becomes real
When we tell it again,
In different words,
As the story that happens in our own lives.

Share this good news,
In words that are right for you.

There has never been a time
When we needed the good news more.