

**Easter in a Time of Coronavirus**  
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**John 20:1-18**

Today, as we celebrate Easter, the resurrection story is perhaps more meaningful than ever before. We come together longing to hear good news. We come together in a time of pandemic, yearning to know that death does not have the final say.

We see signs of spring around us. Birds chirping. Grass starting to green up. Yet we are hibernating as if in the dead of winter. It feels like we are locked up in a dark place, a Good Friday place, more than an Easter place. We are in that waiting time.

During this time of staying at home routines are not the same. The sense of order to life has been upended. In our home, one of the things that has become a regular event is watching the governor's daily COVID-19 briefing at 2 PM. One feature of that daily briefing is the count of how many people in our state are sick with the coronavirus and how many have died from it. Every day the numbers go up. Those daily briefings give us a sense of the impact death is having.

That first Easter Sunday as Mary went to the tomb, the events of Good Friday were emblazoned in her mind. She had seen her beloved Jesus die on that cross. So, she went to the tomb to grieve. She went to the tomb expecting to find death. She went to complete that sad task of preparing Jesus' brutalized body for burial. Imagine her surprise and shock to learn that he wasn't there. He was not in the tomb.

Instead she finds one she believes to be the gardener. It seems odd that she wouldn't recognize Jesus she knew so well. But thinking of Jesus as a gardener may have been strangely appropriate.

The garden is a place of life. Shortly before his crucifixion, Jesus used a gardening metaphor to tell his disciples what was about to happen. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12:24).

That Easter morning, in the garden, Jesus was the living embodiment of the seed. He was like the grain of wheat that had died, been buried, and now had emerged in

resurrected form. He wasn't quite the same as before, so he told Mary not to hold onto him.

I imagine Mary would have liked nothing better than to give Jesus a big hug, to touch him with her own hands, to hold onto him and not let him go. Keeping that physical separation was hard. It made her realize that things were not the same as before. Yes, this was Jesus, her teacher and Lord, "*Rabbouni*," as she called him. But the experience of death and resurrection had changed him in ways she was just beginning to recognize. Over the days and weeks to come Mary and the other disciples would encounter the resurrected Jesus walking through walls to be with them, eating a meal of fish on the shore and ultimately ascending from sight to be with his heavenly father.

As we are faced with death during this time of pandemic, we will ultimately emerge from it. But we, too will be changed by this experience. We have a greater awareness of our interconnectedness with one another. We may have a greater appreciation for our ability to work and bring in a steady income. We may have a greater appreciation for being able to gather together for worship. We will likely have an increased awareness of our mortality, which may in turn bring us closer to God and to one another.

As Mary met Jesus in that garden, her sadness turned to joy in the presence of the risen Christ. Her despair turned to hope. The sense of darkness turned to light. God can take our sorrows and turn them to joy. Those moments in the presence of God bring us a renewed sense of hope. They reconnect us with God's love. And they reenergize us to move forward.

Jesus loves us enough to die for us. Jesus loves us with a love so powerful it overcame death. And because Jesus overcame death, we need not fear death. Jesus went to prepare a place for us with him in eternity. We who believe in Christ will have eternal life. That is a promise he made that we can all depend on. That is the reason Jesus came to earth the reason he lived, and suffered and died, so that we might be forgiven and we might have eternal life.

Our gospel lesson for today ends with Jesus telling Mary to go and tell the disciples that he is risen. That is his message to us as well. We, who have met the risen Christ, are to share that good news, to go and tell others – but for now, please do so while keeping a safe social distance!

Happy Easter! May God bless you and your family with peace and good health. Amen!