

Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed.*

Well before long, we're going to celebrate some baptisms! Just before we do, I'd like to share a short Easter devotional based on a passage from chapter 20 of John's gospel.

Let me start by setting the stage a bit.

It's the third day since Jesus had been crucified and buried in a garden tomb. One of Jesus' followers, Mary Magdalene, is at the tomb for the second time that morning.

Her first visit had taken place before sunrise. That's when she discovered that the massive stone covering the tomb's entrance had been rolled away. Jesus' body was gone. Only his grave clothes remained.

So Mary runs off and finds Peter and John— two of Jesus' disciples— and tells them the shocking news. Peter and John then run back to the tomb with Mary, to see for themselves.

Our gospel reading begins just after Peter and John leave the empty tomb to return home:

Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" the angels asked her.

"Because they have taken away my Lord," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him."

She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him.

"Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

"Mary!" Jesus said. She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "Teacher"). "Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the Lord!” Then she gave them his message.¹

In this passage, we see that ***Easter means a new relationship, a new creation, and a new hope.***

First, Easter means that:

1. A new relationship with God is possible.

Now I speak a bit of Spanish. Emphasis on the words *a bit*. As with some other languages, there are two forms of the word “you” in Spanish— the formal and the informal.

Generally, it’s considered proper to use the formal word *usted* when addressing an elder, for example, or even someone you’ve just met and aren’t that well-acquainted with. But when you have a closer, more familiar relationship with someone, you address them with the informal word *tú*.

The nearest we come to this in English might be when someone who you’ve been calling Dr. Park or Mrs. Jones or Pastor Shaw says to you, “Hey, no need to be so formal. Please call me by my first name.”

Our passage gives us a moment like that, but in a way that’s far more profound. An extraordinary shift in relationship has just taken place.

Up until this point, Jesus had always referred to God as *the* Father, or *my* Father. But now that he’s been raised from the dead, all that has changed. Feel the force of his words to Mary in verse 17:

But go find my brothers and tell them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”²

Bible scholar N.T. Wright explains it this way:

A new relationship has sprung to life like a sudden spring flower. The disciples are welcomed into a new world *where they can know God the way Jesus knew God*, where they can be intimate children of their heavenly Father.³

Before, sin and death had blocked the way, making it impossible for people to have such a relationship with a holy God. But through Jesus’ death for our sin, and his resurrection from the dead, the way to relate to God intimately, as a child to a loving parent— has been opened wide for all who will accept it— including you and me.

Soon, we are going to baptize today’s candidates.

¹ John 20:11-18 (NLT)

² John 20:17 (NLT); emphasis added.

³ N.T. Wright, *John for Everyone: Part Two*, p. 145 (emphasis added)

Easter is an especially meaningful day for baptisms. Because the Bible says in Romans that through baptism, you're "buried" with Christ, so to speak. Going under the water is a picture of that. Then, like Jesus rose from the grave, you are raised up out of the water to a new life in Christ. ⁴

And the heart of that new life is *a new relationship with God*— the most important relationship you can ever have. It's a relationship that's greater than all of your sin. A relationship that's stronger even than death. A relationship that you've been made to grow into, and to enjoy, both now and forever. It's a relationship where Jesus says to you— just like he said to Mary Magdalene in the garden tomb— *now my Father is your Father, my God, your God*.

So Easter means that a new relationship with God is possible. It also means that:

2. A new creation has been set into motion.

After her encounter with the two angels in the garden tomb, Mary suddenly sees a new figure enter into the scene. It's the risen Jesus, but at first she doesn't recognize him.

Mary figures he must be the gardener. In one sense, she's wrong. But in another sense, she couldn't be more right.

Because the book of Genesis tells us that God's original work of creation was centred in a garden. And John wants us to see that the strange figure who stands before Mary in a garden tomb is *the* True Gardener— Jesus, the Second Adam— whom God has charged to restore order to a fallen, rebellious, and chaotic creation. He has come to uproot the thorns and thistles of sin, death, and injustice, and replace them with blossoms and harvests of forgiveness, life, and righteousness.

And his resurrection has set this new creation into motion.

To put it another way, Easter is the new Genesis. It marks the beginning of God's re- creation, restoration, and renewal of this broken world in and through the risen Christ.

Scripture looks ahead to the ultimate completion of this new creation. This is the theme of the Bible's closing chapters in Revelation, where God on his throne says:

"Look, I am making everything new!" ⁵

But what will God's new creation be like once it's complete? Jesus' resurrection gives us some important clues.

The Bible tells us in Philippians that one day, when Jesus returns:

⁴ See Romans 6:3-5

⁵ Revelation 21:5a (NLT)

He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own... ⁶

So the promise of a new creation, for one thing, is not that of a disembodied existence. Rather, all who put their faith in Jesus will be raised from death like he was, and receive a resurrection body like he did— a glorious, vigorous, ageless, immortal body that illness and injury, decay and death, can never, ever touch again.

And instead of an eternity in heaven away from this earth, scripture actually teaches that heaven will come down to earth when the risen Jesus returns to set the whole world right, once and for all. As the Bible says in Revelation:

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever. ⁷

So contrary to popular opinion, Jesus never promised his people a great airlift to spend a disembodied eternity in some wispy, faraway heaven. But God did promise to make all things new in Christ, including people like us, as well as every part of this beautiful world.

I love how author Randy Alcorn puts it. He says:

God promises us eternal [heaven-on-earth] life as totally healthy, embodied people more capable of worship, friendship, love, discovery, work, and play than we have ever been. ⁸

Easter means that a new creation *like that* has been set into motion. Which is to say that in Jesus, all that has gone wrong with this world will ultimately be made gloriously right again. Therefore, thirdly and finally, Easter means:

3. A new hope that all sadness will one day be undone.

In our passage the angels ask Mary:

Dear woman, why are you crying?

Only moments before, Mary had been standing outside the tomb, weeping.

Picture yourself standing there with her as she weeps. What reasons have *you* had to weep? ⁹

⁶ Philippians 3:21A (NLT)

⁷ Revelation 11:15 (NIV)

⁸ Randy Alcorn, *C.S. Lewis on Heaven and the New Earth: God's Eternal Remedy to the Problem of Evil and Suffering*.

⁹ This imaginative exercise has been adapted from N.T. Wright's meditation on this passage in *John for Everyone, Volume 2*, p. 145-146.

Think also of others who've had reason to weep. In your mind's eye, have them join you as you stand outside the tomb with Mary...

Don't rush it. Hear the weeping. Feel the hot tears streak down your face...

And then, when the time is right, stoop down, and look into the tomb...

See the angels. Where had they come from? "Why are you crying?" they ask. Tell them.

And listen to what those you've brought with you into this scene tell them as well. Why are you crying? Some might answer I am crying because they have taken away:

My innocence... my job... my dignity... my rights... my health... my spouse... my child... my hope...

Now hear Mary again: *They have taken away my Lord!* Sense the grief of the whole world, concentrated there in Mary's grief.

Maybe you're familiar with Edgar Allen Poe's haunting poem *The Raven*. In the poem, this sinister bird—a raven— keeps repeating the word, *nevermore*. Throughout the poem, Poe is suggesting that once your youth, your looks, your health, your career, your loved ones are gone—that's it—you can never get them back. *Nevermore*.

But if Jesus' resurrection has set a new creation into motion, then as Tim Keller says, our hope for the future is that one day:

We get it all back — the love, the loved ones, the goodness, the beauties of this life — but in new, unimaginable degrees of glory and joy and strength... [and even these] will be like dewdrops compared to the bottomless ocean of joy that it will be to see God face-to-face.¹⁰

Easter spells the end of death's seeming irreversibility. It spells the end of *nevermore*. Or to borrow the words of J.R.R. Tolkien, Easter means that one day *everything sad is going come untrue*.¹¹

Come back once again to the garden tomb. A strange figure has entered the scene. Is it the gardener?

"Why are you crying?" the stranger asks Mary. "Who are you looking for?" Only when he says her name does she finally realize it's Jesus.

Mary!

Now, as you stand there, confronted with Jesus in the garden tomb, listen as he calls your own name... Do you hear it?

¹⁰ Timothy Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*, p. 59, 117-118.

¹¹ J.R.R. Tolkien, *Return of the King*.

He's alive with a new sort of life, a life you've never seen before.

Yes, hear Jesus call your name. And hear him also call the name of whoever you brought with you to the garden tomb today.

Because when the risen Jesus calls your name, he calls you into a new relationship with God.

When the risen Jesus calls your name, he calls you into a new creation that his resurrection has set into motion.

And when the risen Jesus calls your name, he calls you into a new and living hope that one day all your sadness— and all the sadness of this broken world— will be utterly undone. It will be just as John foresaw in the book of Revelation:

He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.”¹²

It is this hope that not only gives us strength to carry on as we follow and serve Jesus today, but it can also surprise us with joy, right here, right now, in spite of any sadness that may linger for the time-being.

Has Jesus called your name this morning? How do you respond to his call?

For some of you who are new to Cornerstone, a wonderful way to respond will be to start connecting regularly with this church community, if you don't already have a church home. We invite you to worship Jesus with us each Sunday, at either 9:30 or 11:30.

Jesus might also be calling some of you to follow him into the waters of baptism. Our next baptism service will take place on Sunday, June 9. Let this Easter be the day that you let us know of your interest in baptism by filling out a baptism inquiry form at www.cornerstonechurch.ca/baptism. On that page you, can also learn more about baptism.

I trust that the risen Jesus has called many of your names today. But he is especially calling our baptismal candidates. Can you hear him? He's calling:

9:30 – List names

11:30 – List name

Invites candidates to stage and asks them questions

¹² Revelation 21:4 (NLT)