

Wait For It...

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Easter

John 20:1-18

“Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father.”

Movement 1 – We Have Been Waiting for this Moment

We've been waiting for Easter, and it has arrived. We've finally made it; we are at that day when many C and E Christians fulfill the second half of their liturgical obligation. We have been waiting for Easter, and it has arrived. Now we can relax for a couple of months before we begin to think about Christmas. Now we can turn off our spiritual minds for a while before we have to make our turn again to bells and snow. We've been waiting for Easter, and here it is.

Now I'm going to ask you to be honest for just a moment – do you find Easter a little bit mundane? Do you find Easter a little bit routine? After all, it is the same story every year. After all, we can only shout out Christ is risen so much. After all, we can only watch *King of Kings* so many times before it becomes routine. You go to Disney World the first time and it is amazing. You go again and it is still pretty fun. But by the fifth or sixth time, Disney World begins to get dull and routine. Now some of you may not have this experience of Easter, but I bet that others feel that Easter is becoming old hat. It is something that breaks our routine and so we just want to get it over with. I know some pastors who would rather skip the events of Holy Week just to get to Easter because the sooner we get to Easter, the sooner we can get back to the work of the church, the building campaign, the fellowship dinners and the membership drives. We've seen it, we've done it, and we are ready to move on.

Some of us have walked the long path of Lent to get here. We've put the ashes on our forehead, we've fasted for forty days, we've waved the palms in the air, we've gone to that last supper, and wept on the Holy Friday. After all that, we have finally made it to Easter. And in many respects it is just what we expected. No matter what we try to do, there will be a routine nature to Easter. No matter how much glitz and glam, no matter how loud or how soft, something about Easter feels normal. And maybe its disappointing, maybe it makes us feel guilty. We've been waiting for Easter, and finally it is here, and it is just what we've expected.

Movement 2 – Narrative Waiting / Reality Waiting

In a way we are still waiting for Easter. In a way we are still looking for the hope of a resurrected savior. In a way we are still looking for the promise of eternal life. In a way we are still waiting for Easter. One of the four noble truths in Buddhism is that life is suffering, and there are times when we experience that truth – and that when we could use the resurrection. When we are afflicted with illness we could use the hope of resurrection. When we are lost in grief we could use the resurrection. When we are being pulled in one direction and the other with job responsibilities and family responsibilities, and social responsibilities we could use the resurrection. When we are held down by powers and principalities, by systems and structures, by authorities who have decided what we can and cannot do, and we could use the resurrection. Any time we are not allowed to live a full life for whatever reason, we could use the resurrection. You know those times, that's what we went through last week. When we cried out to God for help we were crying for the resurrection.

Imagine being with the disciples right now. Imagine grieving with them. Imagine your heart breaking because the one in whom you placed all your hope has died, has been cut down and has left. They were yearning for the resurrection, and yet could not even imagine it. For the resurrection brings new hope. The resurrection brings new life, and we all yearn for that together; because this can't as good as it gets. I think of parents in the early 20th century who had to send their children to work in a factory – they were yearning for some kind of hope here in America, they were yearning for a resurrection. When my grandmother was three years old her father was killed in a factory accident. My grandmother was one of eleven children, and you can imagine the distress, you can imagine the despair. You can imagine that her mother, her brothers and sisters, and that she was yearning, desiring for a resurrection. There are people in this place of despair every day; we experience hopelessness daily. In the suffering of life, in the reality of life, we are all yearning for a resurrection. We all find ourselves with the disciples on Saturday wondering what to do next. So I am challenging you today, if you are wearing a mask of cynicism or boredom on this Easter, let it go, don't let Easter be routine, and name that part of your life which is crying out, which is yearning for some hope, some peace, which is yearning for a resurrection.

Movement 3 – The Experience and the Signs

Look around and notice the signs. On this Easter, look around and notice the signs. Look around and notice the hints of hope, the peaks of bliss and the rays of promise that shine through our own darkness and despair. Look around and notice the signs.

The Gospel of John is replete with signs. All throughout the gospel we are called to “see” and “hear” about Jesus. Even when he is dead, we see and we hear about Jesus. Go with Mary to the tomb and see what is there. Stripes of cloth but no body! In leaving the cloth, Christ has left the body behind. See the signs of Jesus. Run with Peter and the beloved disciple to the tomb and go inside. See the signs of Jesus! We are given signs of hope of a resurrection. We are given signs of life in the empty tomb. See the signs of Jesus! Look back inside the tomb with Mary and see the angels shining Christ’s glory. See the signs of Jesus. We are given a taste and we are given a tease of the hope and the resurrection of our savior. We are given signs of Jesus.

Even in our own life, we are given signs of hope, signs of Jesus. When we see the hardness of reality soften, we see the signs of hope. When we see a smile begin to crack through a worn face we see the sign of Jesus. Like reading Kerouac, the way he captures life, the way he captures the rhythms of the working, the rhythms of the struggling, and the rhythms of the living. He was looking for signs of what it meant to be alive, and wrote them down. He captured the beauty of life, the beauty of work, and the beauty of diversity. He looked for and saw signs of hope and signs of life and captured those signs in his writings.

There was a time when I received a simple sign. I remember when I was working at an AIDS day shelter there was one guest who was angry. He was angry with himself, he was angry at the world and he was angry with God. His mind was going because of dementia aggravated by the disease. He was going back and forth from assisted living, to government funded living, to living on the streets. He was angry and did not want any hope from anyone, especially me. He knew why I was at the shelter, he knew I represented the church, he knew I found hope in Jesus and wanted nothing to do with me. I remember one day when I tried to find a connection. I tried every avenue, I tried to be as nice as possible but I could not break through his wall of anger. Until I noticed he was eating an Italian Meatball sub. I looked at the sub, and I said to him, “you must really hate yourself if you are going to eat that.” He stopped and looked at me. I said again, “you must really be at rock bottom if you are going to eat that sub.” Really the sub looked fine. The steam was still rising from the sauce and meatballs. The smell was tantalizing. He looked at me and said, “Why?” I responded, “Look at the sauce, there are no spices, and I bet those meatballs are just pressed ground beef without any eggs or breadcrumbs, or any spices. That isn’t an Italian Meatball sub, it is trying to be, but it should be called something else.” For the next thirty minutes, we talked about Italian cooking, and I saw him smile. It was a sign of Jesus. We didn’t talk about his health, we didn’t talk about his living situation, we didn’t talk about God or his anger, and we just talked about good Italian cooking. But it was a sign of hope; it was a sign of the resurrection.

We are given signs daily of hope, we are given signs of Jesus. We have to keep our eyes open to the signs. Peter walked in the tomb and his heart sank. The beloved disciple walked into the tomb and his heart lifted. He saw the signs of Jesus and believed. This is part of living into the Easter story. We may not always see Jesus, but we may see signs of Jesus, and we are called, we are challenged to see the signs and believe. These are signs of life, these are signs of hope, and these are signs of the resurrected Jesus. It is like watching drop of sand fall into a glass of water. If we continue to focus on the water, we will miss the sand, just as Peter and Mary missed the signs pointing to Jesus. But if we watch the sand we will see the beginning of something new. We are given signs daily; we are given signs of Jesus.

Movement 4 – The Appearance of Jesus

Keep your heart open to the appearance of Jesus. Look for the signs but do not rest in just the signs. That would be resting in a symbolic resurrection. That would be the equivalent of a warm and fuzzy sermon, which just said that life is good and we just, have to look for the good. Such a sermon would not grasp the reality of the resurrection. Don’t rest in this “precious moments” view of life, but look for Jesus. We aren’t just looking for the good in life; we are looking for Jesus in life. We will see signs of Jesus working with each and every one of us, and then, every now and again, we will see Jesus. We will see our savior before us, we will experience our savior and we will know that the signs of resurrection point to a truth of Jesus; he lives!

This was Mary’s experience. She saw the signs, she even saw the majestic heavenly beings, but then she saw Jesus. And this gives us hope. Even when we see the signs and fail to believe, even when we see the signs and miss the hope, Christ will still stay with us and even call us with his own voice. St. John Chrysostom described this scene as, “Christ, by calling her by name, turned her to Himself from them, and revealed Himself by His voice...” Christ called Mary to see and believe the hope of the resurrection. And just as Christ called Mary, Christ calls us. When we are so far mired in the bog of despair, Christ, our living Lord, reaches us and pulls us out. When we are surrounded by so much darkness, Christ will cut through the darkness and lead us into the path of light. When the noise from the chaos of our life is so loud that we cannot see or hear anything, Christ’s voice is that carillon call

bringing us back to him. It is that moment when Jesus grabs you, when the Holy Spirit grabs you and says, “Here I am, look at me and believe! Death cannot keep me, tombs cannot keep me, and the greatest powers of humanity cannot keep me. Here I am, look at me and believe!”

I remember two great women of the faith, Teresa of Avila and Sarah Edwards (wife of Jonathan Edwards) who both had this experience of seeing Jesus. Teresa was ill, was struggling to hold to life, and in her darkness she saw Jesus, and she was not just given hope to live, but also to work with and through the church. Sarah Edwards saw the signs of her husband’s preaching, his ministry, and had faith as well. But Jesus came to her and changed her through a religious experience. She saw Jesus and she found a hope for this theology, this new way of doing the church that her husband was suggesting. Beyond the signs, beyond the stories of hope, Christ appears to us and gives us the hope of the resurrection. Just as he did for Teresa of Avila, just as he did for Sarah Edwards, Christ will appear to us when we are in the tomb of our own despair and pull us to the hope of the resurrection.

There are times when the signs are not enough, and when we have to look for the risen Lord. There are times when Jesus will appear to us, challenge us and change us. On this Easter, look for the hope and the presence of the risen Lord.

Movement 5 – Living into the Resurrection

Live into that possibility and that truth. Live into the resurrection. Have you noticed that I have been talking about the resurrection hope all this time, but I haven’t given any indication of what that hope may be? I have told you to look for the signs of the resurrection like those we find in the tomb. I have told you to keep your eyes open for the presence of Jesus so we can fully experience the resurrection. But what does that mean? What does it mean to live into the resurrection? When we live into the resurrection we live a life that has a hope, we live a life that has a joy, we live a life that has a power, which passes understanding, because on this day, we remember, we experience, and we celebrate that Jesus Christ beat death. On this day we declare that there is nothing, which can hold Christ back. On this day we declare that there is nothing which can separate us from the love and call of Christ; not height nor depth, not angels nor demons, not powers nor principalities, not even life or death can keep us from the love of Christ. It has been tried, and it will be tried. The way of the world will tell us that we can only do so much. The narrative of the world will teach us that we can only be so much. But the world cannot keep Christ down, and that is the power of the resurrection. That is the power, that is the hope and that is the life we live into – that nothing can keep our Lord and savior from us.

Remember in *Lord of the Rings* when Gandalf, the gray wizard died, and hope seemed to be lost for the hobbits and the others? Remember when he came back as Gandalf the white? Remember the hope and conviction then because they had a wizard that could not be beaten? That is the hope and the conviction we are to have as well when we see the signs of the resurrection, when we see Christ after the resurrection. Oh can you run with Mary and tell the world?

Run to the child on the street trying to live a right life in a culture of violence and tell him, “I have seen the Lord.

Run to the mother in the apartment building who is trying to make ends meet and trying to raise her children and tell her, “I have seen the Lord.”

Run to the father going home from work, trying to set a good example, trying to provide for his family and tell him, “I have seen the Lord.”

Run to the son who is grieving the loss of his mother and can see no hope for the future and tell him, “I have seen the Lord.”

Run to the woman sick in the hospital looking for hope and looking for compassion and tell her, “I have seen the Lord.”

Run to the ones surrounded by violence, surrounded by despair, surrounded by greed and hatred and tell them, “I have seen the Lord.”

Run and tell them, and stay with them, and show them the hope you have for them in their own situations. Show them the hope you have for them because you find hope in Christ the risen Lord. Then you are living the resurrection, and then you are living with Christ. You are free to be the people God intends you to be, no matter what anyone says. You may say, but Lord, I am a sinner, and God replies, you are forgiven. You may say, but Lord my life is in such shambles that I am not the one to spread your gospel, and God replies, I have made your life holy through the cross. You are free to be a child of God and a messenger of the Gospel through the resurrection. You are free to be the church God intends you to be no matter what anyone says. Nothing will stand in your way, because Christ the Lord has risen today. Not doubts or skepticism, not questions or fear of scarcity. This freedom is the resurrection! Live into that possibility, live into that truth.

Movement 6 – Wait for it...

This is the power of the resurrection. This is why we come back here every year, because we need to hear this story, we need to be reminded about this story, and we need to live this story. My brothers and sisters, there will

be days when you will not be able to see the resurrection. There will be days that you will be those days like Good Friday when all you know is despair and darkness. But as the great sermon goes, "It may be Friday, but Sunday's coming!" But we can't rush it. We can't force it, for when we force Easter then it becomes mundane and routine. When we demand the resurrection then it becomes contrived. But when we wait for it, when we look for it, when we keep our hearts open to the hope and peace of the resurrection, then it will be powerful and profound and it will be the work of God. Look for that hope, and Christ will bring you through. Look for that peace and Christ will carry you through Saturday into the joy of Sunday. Oh it was Friday. Oh we were in pain. Oh we were in grief, but today is Sunday and today Jesus Christ lives! It is Sunday and our Lord is raised! It is Sunday and I'm here today to shout out "Christ is risen! Christ is risen! Christ is risen!" I can't wait any more! I can't sit still any more, because Christ is risen and I am redeemed. Oh I want to tell the story, I want to hear the story, and I want to live the story of Jesus Christ, my Lord, my risen Lord!

AMEN