

The first time I remember watching a sunrise on purpose was on a mission trip when I was fourteen years old. We were near a beach and my youth leader Fran got us up early so we could see the sunrise on Easter morning. Now I have always been a night owl, so I was not thrilled about this six A.M. wake up call. There we sat, twelve teenagers quiet from lack of sleep and shivering in the cold of the dark morning. But you see Fran knew something that we young teenagers didn't know. She knew we were about to see beauty that took our breath away.

The sun rose slowly over the ocean and the most beautiful and brilliant colors I had ever seen painted the sky. It was breathtakingly beautiful. I will never forget that sunrise because something within me changed and although I could not put words to it at the time, I now realize that I saw the embodiment of God's promise of a new day: the embodiment of God's hope realized in the action of the rising sun.

That day I understood we had to sit in the darkness of morning to appreciate the beautiful sunrise.

Darkness in where our Scripture from John starts today and where we left off from our Good Friday service. At the end of Good Friday we were in darkness and mourning, just like Mary Magdalene, that Jesus Christ was crucified.

Here we see Mary searching for Jesus. She was looking for his body, but it was not in the tomb and instead of rejoicing in hope, she turned to fear and sadness that someone had stolen the body of Jesus.

I think that we can all relate to Mary's experience of grief, now more than ever. For the past couple of weeks, we may have felt like we were in darkness, not knowing what lied ahead.

We too, may have turned to grief and fear instead of expectant hope. We too may have not recognized that Christ was right in front of us.

It is hard to recognize Jesus when you stop looking for him. Yet Jesus kept talking to Mary so that she would see that hope and new life were right in front of her.

As the darkness of the morning turned into light and as she continued to hear the voice of Jesus, she realized he was alive!

Her profound moment of grief turned into jubilant praise and she became the first to be charged to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

Today we celebrate that Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life!

On this day we are comforted that many other people in the Bible experienced grief but found hope and new life through their faith in God. Our reading today from the Old Testament is from a man who experienced every kind of grief imaginable. In one moment, Job lost all his possessions, his servants, and his children. Talk about profound grief. The next day he lost his health and was covered in sores. He even felt alienated by his friends. Ashes on his forehead were not enough to mourn this loss.

We hear in Job 2 that he was sitting on an heap of ashes which seems appropriate as a way for him to quantify all the grief he had encountered.

Yet, even in the midst of his suffering and grief we hear these words of hope from Job 19:25: “I know that my redeemer lives...” If Job can have faith like this after losing everything, then we can hold onto our faith in Jesus Christ even the midst of hardship, grief, and this current pandemic.

When Job was faced with death, he chose hope and life.

Today, Christ is calling us to remember another story of death and life. We remember another Mary who was mourning. Mary was mourning the death of her brother, Lazarus. They had asked Jesus to come and save him, but Jesus had not arrived, and Lazarus had been dead for four days. Mary had lost hope and she wouldn't even go to meet Jesus on the road when he arrived.

Martha in her typical to-do fashion couldn't sit still so she went out to meet Jesus. He offered her comfort in the promise of resurrection. She agreed that someday Lazarus would rise from the dead.

Jesus used this moment to share with her his identity as Savior. Christ said: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”²⁷ She said to him, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe...’ (John 11:25-27).

Just like Job, Martha had faith and chose hope and new life.

We know how this story ends. Lazarus is brought back to life and rejoins his sisters. The community helps unwrap him from the trappings of death and he gets to live another day.

In the book, “The God We Can Know,” Rob Fuquay talks about the difference between resuscitation and resurrection. He explains, “Resuscitation means bringing back to life—returning to the way it was. Resurrection means a whole new life, a different life.”ⁱ To experience resurrection instead of resuscitation in our faith, Fuquay shares that we must “face death squarely and move through it...When we can accept the things we cannot change and remain open to God’s power to do new things, we discover what resurrection is.”ⁱⁱ

More than any other time in our faith, we like Job, Mary, and Mary Magdalene are facing death. We are facing the death of people all over the world from the corona virus and we are facing the grief of isolation and the inability to gather with the community of God in person on Easter.

Instead of getting lost in the darkness of grief and death, Easter calls us to celebrate our resurrection lives.

The good news for our lives today is that our resurrection lives can begin now.

Resurrection is both a present and future reality. We experience resurrection now when we see God restore things that were shattered. I don’t know about you, but I have seen God move in mighty ways to restore relationships and families that were completely broken. I have seen people turn their lives completely around through the power of God.

Living resurrection lives now means we know that we will always have a relationship with Christ, in life, in death, and in life beyond death. We experience resurrection now when we open ourselves to the new life that is all around us.

God is still conquering death through Jesus Christ, but are you opening yourself to see this happening in the world?

How have you experienced Christ saving you and saving the world through your faith in Him?

After her encounter with Jesus, Mary Magdalene became the first evangelist to share the good news of the risen Lord. She would never have a doubt in her mind again about who Jesus was. Her testimony was not long or complex she stated: “I have seen the Lord” (John 20:18).

Today we too have seen the Lord.

Even though we are unable to be together to celebrate this truth, God’s beautiful action during this pandemic is to remind us that God has already defeated death through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now it is up to us to share with others how we have seen the Lord.

I wonder how you have seen the power of Jesus Christ and resurrection during this time. Perhaps it is through a relationship that you have had the time to nurture, time you may not have had before. Perhaps it is through people all over our community helping one another and fostering new life.

The questions before all of us today is how will we continue to live into our resurrection lives now?

In order to not go back to lives of resuscitation we must reimagine our lives from this moment forward in a different way. What are the things in our lives that we spend time on that are not fostering new life? Why do we keep doing these things?

I want to issue you a challenge on this Easter Sunday. Give up one behavior you have that is taking you away from God. Whether it is busyness or lack of prayer time. Make this be the day that everything changes so you can more fully live into your resurrection lives.

To get your creativite juices flowing I wanted to share with you one way a local business is fostering new life.

Between Flint Hill UMC and Willis Chapel UMC there lies Rappahannock Cellars Winery. This winery is known for its beauty and delicious wines. They have a distillery on-site called Dida’s Distillery.

During this time of pandemic, they started receiving requests from hospitals and other first responders to make hand sanitizer. You see distilleries are in a unique position to be able to immediately start producing hand sanitizer, where other start up businesses would take 6-9 months to make this happen.ⁱⁱⁱ

On March 23, Dida’s Distillery started a go-fund me campaign to be able to receive the supplies they needed to make hand sanitizer and then donate it to first responders and hospitals in need, keeping people safe and alive.^{iv}

What is beautiful about this creative response to a problem is that they cannot complete this project on their own. So, people in the community and beyond are helping them.

The Fairfax Fire Department were the first to volunteer to help package the materials and now 265 gallons have been donated and 1300 more are coming!^v

In the same way, people all over our community have been sewing face masks with scraps of material they have at home and donating them to first responders. Both these efforts are saving people’s lives.

These ideas show us that we may not be aware that we have all the resources we need to participate in God’s saving ministry in the world. During this time, I look forward to hearing creative ideas from you for how we can participate in God’s saving ministry now and in the future.

May we continue to be creative and open to all the ways that God calls us to participate in ministries that foster new life and may we be thankful that Jesus is offering us new life every day through our faith in Him. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ Rob Fuquay. “The God We Can Know.” Upper Room Books: Nashville TN. 2014. P. 111.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.virginiabusiness.com/article/during-crisis-va-distilleries-pivot-to-produce-hand-sanitizer/>

^{iv} <https://www.gofundme.com/f/didas-distillery-emergency-hand-sanitizer>

^v Ibid.

Additional Resource

Keck et al. “The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary.” Vol. IX. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 1995.