



Easter in All of Life

Rev Cate Thorn

Easter Day

Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18

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Easter day is here. How many of you find a lightness, a quiet joy that comes with the dawning of this day? Perhaps it surprises you. My guess is this is particular to Christians, given the Easter story is a Christian one, telling of death overcome. Of God, made in human form in Jesus, vanquishing death as oblivion and gifting this to those who believe.

A story first arising from the experience of those who were witness to the events of Jesus' death. A story that developed as those first witnesses tried to make sense of what had happened. A story that's become Christian tradition. Evolving over time as each generation in their time and place tried to make sense of how this still speaks. Maybe in our day whether it still does. What it has to say of how we are to live within the world and context we find ourselves.

A religious tradition promising that, with God, life will be better, the burdens of life eased. The intimation of a heavenly afterlife reward, of a God who'll dip down and save us when things are too much to bear. We may not **think** of ourselves aligned this way, but I wonder if it's an undercurrent in us, an implicit enacting.

Through Jesus, our religious tradition proclaims, God's released us from the burden of brokenness (saved us) and so it matters how we live. Labour hard and faithfully to be worthy of this gift. Do your best to be good (escape the vestiges of sin that cling to you). Even though

you've been saved, you shouldn't rest on your laurels. Religion's a way to ensure you keep to the straight and narrow.

As we look around our world it's hard not to see life as hard and full of suffering. And for us to look to religion to help us make sense of this. It's as if we know the world is not meant to be the way it is. That suffering happens because we're not aligned with God and we visit this on creation. In Jesus we're shown that we can live and participate in transforming the world. **With** God we're given hope things can be better that we can live otherwise, that there's another way. In turning to God, paying attention to what God requires of us, we can learn to live in a way that will better the lot of the world.

Religion, thus, provides solace and rescue, a way to understand life, a framework to guide, direction and purpose to negotiate the challenges of real life. Lending us hope and inspiration, it strengthens and enables us. We learn we can lend our shoulder to the divine task of trying to improve things. Bring relief where there's injustice, violence and suffering in the world, where God seems absent. But until things are properly fixed, we shouldn't really expect too much. Are we, still, expecting God to ultimately prevail, to fix things properly. Are we looking **from** the world to God, for God, for respite, for deliverance?

This Easter season, I want to invite you to look at things another way. Rather than calling us to turn our eyes heavenward to contemplate the glory of God (which is fine, by the way). God who rescues us from the travail of this world, could this religion of ours be calling us to turn **toward** our world. To look more deeply into it. To have eyes to see, hearts expectant, be full of hope to meet and know God. For this world, our dwelling place, is a dwelling place of God.

Let's consider the great triduum: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Day. With trepidation, we can manage the soft tread, through

the foot washing, last supper ritual, stripping of altars of Maundy Thursday. We can bear the solemn aching absence of Good Friday, because we know Easter day is coming. As Easter day begins, with relief and great joy we enter the glorious celebration of the new day.

But what if the invitation of the triduum is not only or mostly about the glory of Easter Day. What if the invitation is pointing us to see that God presence is revealed **within all** of life. **Within** putting God to death. **Within** the silent, temple curtain rending, sky darkening, earthquake shattering hours after Jesus' death. **Within** the agony of absence, the bleak emptiness of Holy Saturday. Without necessarily the promise of relief.

Because in those moments and times, God absence **is** real, desolation **is** real. We live fully in those times, yet we resist them, want to dismiss or glance over them. Perhaps out of fear that, somehow, through our failure or inadequacy God's abandoned us. God absence in such times **is** real, as far as we know, as far as we experience. Because we cannot imagine God with us in such darkness.

And yet, let's listen to today's gospel.

Mary, heartbroken, bereft, in dim light of new morning garden, cannot see Jesus. She's looking for the Jesus she knows. Mary cannot see the Jesus before her until she's called by name, called back to herself. Pulled from her narrative of loss and grief upon the death of her beloved Jesus, upon the death of all the hopes and expectations she had of him. Called by name, Mary is called to be present. To the moment in which she is. To whom she is, to her-self the one that precedes any narrative.

In that moment, Mary has eyes to see, to recognise Jesus **as he is**. As she does, with tears of joy, reaching for him, Jesus tells Mary not to grasp, not to hold onto him, not to create another storyline about this recognising. For doing so will bind Jesus, to ways of being known, to

expectations that will resist change and that with time will take fixed form. And miss the fluidity of a living relationship that flourishes when unfettered from the need to grasp and control.

We, like Mary, tend to make our way through our world looking for what we expect to see, in ways we're accustomed to, aligned with what we know. The world is the way it is we say. This way might just happen to match the narratives that bombard us, convince us, over time become part of us.

But imagine, amidst that busy distraction, hearing your name called by the quiet voice of God, as Mary did. Calling you back to yourself. And for you to pause, just for a moment, be still. And listen. Listen for the breath and rhythm of the natural world, allow your own breathing to slow and match. Allow the convincing rhetoric besieging you to ease and fade. Become aware of your-self, that one that precedes any narrative. Let this self unfurl, so you are better able to hear and see the world **as it is**. A world that's flourishing, unfettered from our greed, our grasping need to control.

This Easter let us loosen our holding tight to God, the God we think we need. Instead let us learn to receive God, with us, wherever we may be in life. For this world, with all this includes, is our dwelling place and the place of our knowing God.