

Easter 2024

**Alleluia! Christ is Risen.**

**The Lord is Risen Indeed. Alleluia.**

Looking upon you God's beloved, I can't help but consider how we are all so connected. I hope my words bring the hope and love of Easter for you. And if they don't, I pray that the Spirit will take care of the rest.

I have a few personal ways that have been on my mind... mostly personal... and I hope when you hear them, some of your moments in life will come to mind.

First one.

Our EYC traveled to Wyoming this summer and to Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. We did our share of hiking... for some maybe too much. I was completely undone... by the majestic wild beauty of the place.

And long after we came home, I felt, and still feel strangely comforted in thinking that those parks will always be there. No matter where I go, I could bring myself

back. These are for me mystical places of connection. They remind me... assure me... that there is so much more to this world, and so much more to the God of love than I can see or fathom.

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In Celtic spirituality, these are called “thin” places... the closest you can get from this world and beyond; where we can connect to the past, present and the future, all at the same time. And they can confirm the age-old human sense that there is, in fact, more... and we no longer doubt.

Second one.

In late August 2005, our Gulf Coast lived through the horrors of Hurricane Katrina. I have heard some of your stories, of the destruction even this far north from the coast. Catastrophic doesn't even begin to describe it. Moreover, our systems for crisis management failed miserably... and the world watched.

I was a senior at Ole Miss at the time. For these kinds of moments, we remember where we were, don't we? In north Mississippi, I admit the feeling was different. I

was fine. I was merely carrying on with life as a college student. Meanwhile, there were those from the coast who left school to their families; to rebuild and recover... whatever that meant. But I remember being somehow connected to those experiencing incalculable hardship.

We feel this same connection to people who experience life in a vastly different way than we do. Perhaps you know what I mean. Someone on your mind, who lives in a hurricane of grief or trauma this day while you are okay.

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And we are here.

And we have this urgency, almost desperation to do something for those we love and care about.

In large part because we are okay. And they are not.

This feeling I know is in the room this morning. This feeling moves us all and compels us to do things for those around us. It stirs in us one of the most valuable aspects of being human... empathy. And the more we practice empathy, the more naturally it comes. And this is not an accident. We were made that way for a reason.

Last one. This one I see all the time.

- one spouse is drowning while the other is flying.
- a woman struggling with infertility being happy for her best friend's pregnancy announcement.
- Someone who just finalized a divorce now standing next to their best friend in the bridal party.

How do we share in another's joy while we grieve?

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So, still with me? Here's what I would like to say about the meaning of this day.

We will never fully understand it. But we are connected to this day as we hold these together.

- Awareness of life in this world and what lies beyond.
- Feeling the sufferings of another to take them on as our own.
- Willing to share another's joy even when we are grieving.

Easter lands there.

It's what connects us.

Richard Rohr describes this as “the body of Christ being crucified and resurrected at the same time.”

It's a way of being that unites death to life... this world to the next. It's what Raises us up to whatever joy is possible on the other side of the greatest human sorrow.

It's amazing!

What we need to remember is when we consider all this is that Jesus, before the resurrection, was, for those who knew him before he died, was a walking and breathing “thin place.” He went about doing good, showing people how to love in the way God loves.

And then he died a cruel and vindictive death.

“We had hoped” one said. “We had hoped that this one would redeem us all.”

This is why the empty tomb is such a powerful place... why it becomes a thin place for Mary. She comes to a tomb expecting to find death, yet she discovers tomb empty. And the one who she first believes to be the gardener stands next to her. And she is right. This is the gardener. This is the one who has been caring for, cultivating, and tending to her, to you, to me, and all of creation since the beginning of time. This is the one who has connected us to them and each other forever.

Because of Easter, we believe that even now, Christ makes thin places for us and through us. God makes the distance from us and what lies beyond us closer than our very breath. This is what Christians believe.

Then there is that other part, holding both grief and joy. So, if you are not feeling especially joyful today, you are in pretty good company. Mary isn't particularly joyful either. It takes time for new life to rise from death. It takes time for the grief to ease.

But if you are feeling joy, for Christ's sake, shield it. For even in times of great sorrow, there is a place for laughter, for connection and goodness. Those who are lonely or afraid, need you... need to witness your joy.

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This is where we come in. While resurrection is about God and what God does, it's also about us. We too are called to share the joy of this morning; to reach out to those who suffer. Whenever we delight in the joy of our neighbor... whenever we focus on doing good without asking anything in return, that is resurrection.

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And when our heart breaks for what another goes through, we go to them. When we know love is needed, the church will respond. That's resurrection. Wherever there is joy, we celebrate and protect it, even if it isn't ours. That's resurrection working in each of us.

Be open to the people and places that make you believe there is more beyond. Trust that God connects us wherever we find ourselves today, whether in joy or sorrow, as Christ comes to Mary.

But in the meantime, we are called to live with compassion and love. We can't do this on our own and we aren't meant to. Resurrection is God's work. And it's happening right now in all the wounded and sacred places of our lives and of this world. And we can be part of it... Go. Go out and proclaim to the world what you have seen... Go share in the joy in seeing the risen one whenever it's found.

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