

## “Jesus Let Loose”

A reflection for the Sunday of the Resurrection  
by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)

Matthew 28.1-10

April 17, 2022

*After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary the Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.*

*And look! A great earthquake! For an angel from the Lord, descending from the sky, came to the stone, rolled it away and was sitting upon it. He looked like lightning, his clothes as white as snow. The guards were so terrified of him, they quaked and became dead-like.*

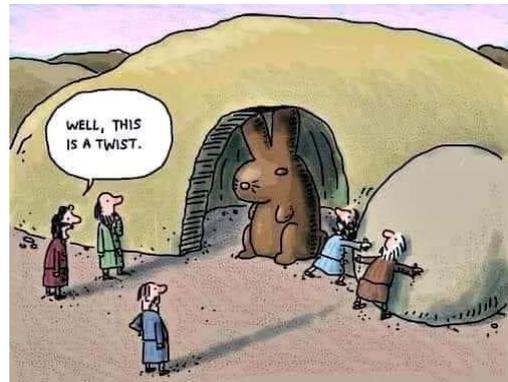
*But the angel said to the women, “Don’t you be afraid, because I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, because he has been raised from the dead, just as he said. Come, see the place where he had laid. Now quick, go and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead. And look! He goes ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there.’ Look! I have told you.”*

*With great fear and great joy, they quickly left the tomb and ran to announce it to his disciples. And look! Jesus met them, saying “Hi!” They came and held his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and announce to my brothers that they should go to Galilee. They will see me there.”<sup>1</sup>*

Rolling back the stone, they saw looking out at them a giant chocolate bunny. That would be a plot twist! Not quite terrifying.

We tend to treat Easter more as rabbit than resurrection. Not scary at all. What actually happened that morning, it was full of terror. Which fits the reality.

And the reality? It’s great news!



---

<sup>1</sup> I have used the Common English Bible, along with David Bentley Hart, [The New Testament: A Translation](#) (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 61. As well, I relied on some of the translation choices made by Frederick Dale Bruner in his [Matthew: A Commentary: Volume 2: The Churchbook, Matthew 13-28](#), revised and expanded edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 779 ff.

This was written as a prayer for early Easter Sunday morning before sunrise:

*O God . . . may we so wait, enclosed in your darkness,  
that we are ready to encounter **the terror of the dawn**,  
with Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>*

"The terror of the dawn." Does the sunrise scare you? The dark, sure. By daylight you can see more clearly. Which can be more terrifying.

Imagine those two Marys as that day dawns. I'm sure they are still terrorized by the horrors of Friday. While others had fled, they had stayed at hand with Jesus, through to his excruciating end.

Until then, they had hoped. Now they are going to his grave, their nightmare.

Sunrise reveals the day. Another day without. . . . Who are you terribly missing? Another day since. . . . What was your dream, now lost? Another day with. . . . What guilt, shame, burden do you carry? At night we can close our eyes. By day we're forced to see.

Nowadays we're forced to see lots. Like, we're not as "all in this together" as we'd thought. And we can't even agree about how to disagree. And racial bigotry bubbles away. And our beloved country is not so lovely. And invasions are still the world's way. And vows of "never again" are hollowed out with each new genocide. And things aren't necessarily getting better. And progress can't be assumed. And human nature—our nature—persists with an ugly streak. Many of us were hiding within sweet dreams, and dawn rips the covers away.

Ahead, the grave. We had hoped. . . . But Jesus is dead and buried, guarded and sealed shut. Terror keeps dawning.

II

What happens next is an apocalypse.

That word literally means, "uncovering." Something we were not seeing, were not able to see, God "apocalypses." God suddenly shows us.

God's apocalypse seismically shakes the earth, so whatever we had been standing on is no longer sure. God's apocalypse seismically shakes our cool confidences, rendering our guards as good as dead. God's apocalypse is an eye-clearing, truth-clarifying, foundations-uplifting unveiling. Look! See! God rips our covers away.

---

<sup>2</sup> From the service for the Easter Vigil, in Celebrate God's Presence: A Book of Services for the United Church of Canada. (Toronto, ON: United Church Publishing House, 2000), 183.

Is this good? Are you glad? If it is God doing it . . . trust.

All that happens that morning is so we can see what we never imagined. (Sure, Jesus said it would happen. Did anyone believe him?)

First, the stone rolling back. It's not about letting Jesus out. The no-longer-dead man has already walked.<sup>3</sup> Moving the stone is so we can see in, and see for ourselves. This tomb is full of emptiness. Jesus is not here anymore.

Then, the stone-roller. There is nothing chocolate-bunny about this angel. Pure brightness, perched atop the rock. The graveyard shift freaks out with fear.

*"Don't you be freaking out too!"* the angel tells these disciples. *"Remember why you're here. Looking for crucified Jesus. No need to fear. He has gotten up and got out. Look here! Now go. You've got word to spread. Tell them to go back to where you're all from, up in Galilee. There he will be. You'll see! I'm telling you. Now it's yours to tell."*

Jesus is on the loose.

With that these Marys, they become part of the apocalypse, the uncovering so others can see. Listen to them, so you can see too.

### III

*"Do not be afraid!"* the angel said. Fat chance of that. You're not going to whistle your way through the apocalypse. Not yet.

Now, however, their fear is different. Leaving behind the slowly un-dying soldiers, Mary and Mary sprint away to do their job. They still have mega-fear, it says. Also gimongous joy.

Can you hold the two together, fear and joy?

Have you stood at the front, and heard someone say, *"I now pronounce you married?"* Joy. Fear. Ever held a newborn? Joy. Fear.

Mary and Mary, what joy fills them with fear? That it could be true? That it's too good

---

<sup>3</sup> On the sequence of the stone rolling, the 4 Gospel accounts vary. Mark, Luke, and John tell us that the stone had already been moved when the women arrived (see Mark 16.4; Luke 24.2; John 21.1). Matthew alone relates that the stone was rolled away after their arrival. We need not feel any urgency to harmonize these variations, nor the others that exist in the biblical record. It all has the feel of eyewitnesses trying to relate and make sense of a necessarily confusing experience. Instead of "getting their stories straight," these eyewitnesses stuck to the most important truth: the tomb was empty, and they saw Jesus. About this, they all agree.

to be true?

Because if God has raised Jesus from the dead. . . . It's not just that God has done some wacky, wonderful thing here. If God has, once and for all, raise this Jesus from the dead, then God is pretty much saying, "*What this Jesus has been all about, I the Lord God Almighty am all about.*"

This Jesus sets the table for those kept away. Turns out, that's a God-thing. This Jesus turns water into wine to keep the party going. That's a God-thing! This Jesus forgives the most wicked offender. This Jesus makes right even those who have done most wrong. This Jesus tangles with the highest power; this Jesus serves the lowest slave. This Jesus brings down the puffed up; this Jesus lifts up the trodden-down.

This Jesus charges into battle on a donkey, and commands "Love your enemy." This Jesus makes a right-royal mess in the religious marketplace. This Jesus breaks the bread of liberation, pours the cup of salvation, and says "It's me!"

This Jesus cannot even carry his own cross, with his broken and bleeding body. They hang him on it. As they mock him, this Jesus dies.

All this that Jesus does, is God's thing. For God raised this Jesus from the dead.

Joy! Scary! And now, he's let loose!

#### IV

The Marys don't get far before they find out.

[cheery] "*Hi!*"

[shocked] "*Jesus!*"

[worshipping] "*My God! Jesus!*"

"*Don't be afraid.*" Jesus tells them this. Think about it. They'd seen him punctured and torn, dead and buried. Now he stands there saying, "*Don't be afraid.*" They've just experienced a seismic apocalypse. "*Don't be afraid.*" The angel told them, "*Don't be afraid.*" Did not work. They've got joy down in their heart, but fear still fills them.

"*Don't be afraid.*" Now it's Jesus saying it. To them. To you. You don't have to be afraid. It's Jesus with you.

With Jesus now, we can live unafraid. He's on the loose. So wherever you are, there he is.

It's another day without that person . . . grieve, but do not be afraid. For with Jesus is your comfort and hope. Another day since that disappointment . . . regret, but do not be afraid. For with Jesus is your call and your purpose. Another day with that burden . . . repent, but do not be afraid. For with Jesus is your forgiveness.

Our world's a rough place. We're seeing it. Maybe we're seeing it better. No need to close our eyes to the ugly stuff. No need to pretend we are somehow not part of it, or exempt from it, or past it. Jesus lets us see. It's Jesus. Do not be afraid.

God raised him from the dead. With him, God raises us too! So no need to be afraid. He's gone ahead, into the world. Go after him. Catch up! See what he's up to. Join in. By God, he is loose in the world. What he's doing, it's God's thing.

Fear? With Jesus, you'll get so taken up with him, you won't have time to be afraid.

Thanks be to God! Amen.