

“ALIVE!”
(John 20:1-18)
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[East Cobb U.M.C.; 4-4-10]

-I-

1. **[BOTH Services:]** Read Text: John 20:1-18 (and Pray).
2. **[WATCH VIDEO:]** “*Celebrate Easter: Not Dead But Alive!*” (Time: 2:25) from SermonSpice.com]
3. Every Easter, one of the challenges we face as a church is not having enough parking for everyone that wants to attend our Easter services.

A—And so, for the five years that I’ve been your Senior Pastor, one of my Easter morning “traditions” (of sorts) has been to free up room here by parking over at what we call our “Triangle” property on the corner of Roswell and Sewell Mill Rds.

B—But many of you know that there’s no sidewalk or path leading from there to here, so what I (and others who park over there) have to do... is to walk through the cemetery next door in order to reach our buildings.

1—Now, keep in mind that my walk is *early* on Easter morning... before the sun comes up (so I can get here in time for our Sunrise service).

2—At that hour, it’s cold, dark, damp, and (quite frankly) a bit eerie... walking among the dead while fumbling around to find a path through the tombstones.

4. And yet, even though I didn’t intend it at first, over the years the irony of this “tradition” has struck me as quite profound...

A—I mean, Easter morning is as good a time to walk through a cold, dark cemetery as any, right? ...because *that’s* what Mary was doing on that *first* Easter – she came looking for a dead Jesus in the cold and darkness of the morning!

B—But *she* soon learned (like we’re invited to learn) that Easter is a story of resurrection – a story of the dead coming back to life;...a story of God’s power and ability and desire to give “life” to the “dead things” of our lives.

C—So this morning, I want to talk about just a few of these “dead things” that Easter can resurrect (e.g., bring back to life) in each of us, if we’ll allow it. (*See bulletin Sermon Notes*)

-II-

5. First of all, Easter can resurrect in us **HOPE from despair**.

A—The first two verses of today’s scripture tell us that Mary went to the tomb intending to anoint Jesus body for burial, but that on seeing the heavy stone over the door rolled away, she ran back to town, shouting that someone had stolen his body!

1–For Mary, the awful nightmare of the past few days had just gotten worse – the man who’d changed her life, who’d promised the coming kingdom of God, ...had been falsely accused, wrongfully convicted, and then brutally executed before her very eyes. And now, even his dead, lifeless body wasn’t safe!

2–For Mary, whatever Hope she’d had had been dashed into Despair!

B–You know, there are times in *our* lives where something similar happens to the hope within many of us:

1–Out of the blue, we get a phone call about a tragic accident that a loved one’s been in, and our world changes forever.

2–Or perhaps we listen in shock as a doctor gives us a diagnosis about ourselves or someone we love that rocks our world.

3–Or maybe we ache from the pain caused by the words or behaviors of people who should know better (perhaps even people of faith). And when that damage is done, over time the optimism of our youth slowly fades into apathy, mistrust, & cynicism.

4–Any of this sound familiar? What things do *you* despair of? What things have *you* lost hope in? ...Other people? Your church? Your government? Your Leaders? Yourself? Perhaps even your ability to overcome a bad habit or hang-up?

C–Well, of course, Mary later learns that her Master is not really dead after all, but alive, and along with this knowledge comes the truth for her and for us that the despair of our life can be turned into Hope by the power of Easter!

1–When I was growing up, my home church ended every Sunday night service with the congregation singing the chorus of an old song by Bill and Gloria Gaither:

*“Because he lives I can face tomorrow,
Because he lives all fear is gone.
Because I know he holds the future,
And life is worth the living,
Just because he lives.”*¹

2–The song may be dated, but the words never will be, because Easter brings HOPE to the things of life for which we may otherwise despair.

6. But not only that: ...Easter can also resurrect in us **BELIEF from doubt.**

A–Verses 8-9 says that when two of the disciples followed Mary back to the empty tomb, the first one (MSG) “*went in,... took one look at the evidence and believed.*” (NRSV) “*went in,... saw and believed.*”

1–You know, when we’re children, we often live in a world of make-believe – we have “make believe” friends, we “make believe” we’re a superhero or someone else, and even create “make-believe” stories with our action figures, dolls & toys.

2–But as we grow up, the harsh realities and “hard knocks” of life turn many of us cynical and pessimistic – we stop believing in things other than what we can see and touch and control *for ourselves*.

3–Some of us stop believing that change is possible in others, or that a particular relationship can ever be healed (like with our spouse, or a child, or friend).

4–Some of us have experienced such pain & disappointment that we stop believing *in ourselves*, or in the fundamental goodness of life, or that there is even a God at all!

B–And yet, the Bible story is that Easter is an *antidote* to our unbelief – a treatment for our pessimism & cynicism. It’s a restoration of optimism in life and belief in both ourselves, in others, and in God.

C–So, what things of life have *you* lost belief in? Whatever they are, Easter can resurrect in you and me genuine BELIEF again.

7. But not only can Easter bring Hope from despair, and Belief from doubt, but it can also resurrect in us **JOY from sorrow**.

A–In Verse 11, we find Mary still mourning the unexplained absence of Jesus’ body, weeping uncontrollably outside his tomb – even though the two disciples believed, *her* joy was gone, *stolen* away just as surely as his body *seemed* have been.

B–You know, there are times that life and its circumstances “steals” our joy, as well.

1–Oh, it can be caused by our work and all the commitments we have, or by the stress and strain of responsibilities we’re under.

2–It can be “stolen” by our financial situation – ...perhaps by a heavy load of debt leaving us to wonder if we’ll be able to support our family; or by a business deal that went sour, leaving us holding the bag and shouldering the blame.

3–Our joy can be “stolen” by grief over an empty chair where our loved one used to sit, ...Or by an estranged relationship, a broken marriage, a broken heart, or even a relationship gone bad by a friend who hurt us deeply.

4–The joy of our life can even been “stolen” by the guilt of our own sinful actions that feel like a sentence of death, wondering if God will forgive us.

5–You know, the Bible says that “*The joy of the Lord is [our] strength.*”² But that means that when we *don't* have joy, we *have no* strength... no passion, no energy or excitement for life – we’re just “here,” going through the motions.

6–Every felt that way? Well, that’s what Mary was feeling.

C–But today’s story says that in the midst of her sorrow, Mary encounters a mysterious gardener who tells her that Jesus is *not* dead but alive.

1–And when she finally recognizes him as her Master, her sorrow turns to Joy – her strength and passion for life are resurrected,...

2–...Because Easter brings JOY to the things of life that might otherwise fill us with sorrow and pain.³

–III–

8. So, what this all tells us is that out of Despair, Doubt and Sorrow, the power and reality of Easter can bring about Hope, Belief and Joy in each one of our lives.

A–It tells us that when we experience the “dead things” of *this* world (whatever they are and however they manifest themselves), Easter can bring about new life in us and for us.

B–It tells us that whenever we have to walk through the cold and dark “cemeteries” of this life, God’s grace will empower us to walk towards the sunrise of resurrection.

9. And when that happens, then we (like Mary) are able to shout to the world [**slowly and deliberately**], “*I... have seen... the Lord... [ALIVE!]*”

10. [PRAY]

ENDNOTES:

1. Refrain of hymn “*Because He Lives,*” The United Methodist Hymnal #364.

2. Nehemiah 8:10.

3. The lyrics of Sydney Carter’s hymn “*The Lord of the Dance*” (The United Methodist Hymnal #261) express well the joy of the Easter message:

*“I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black; It's hard to dance with the devil on your back.
They buried my body and they thought I'd gone; But I am the dance and I still go on:
Dance, then, wherever you may be; I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be, And I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.”*

Another poem characterizes the joy of Easter in this way:

*“Let's celebrate Easter with the rite of laughter. Christ died and rose and lives.
Laugh like woman who holds her first baby. Our enemy death will soon be destroyed.
Laugh like a man who finds he doesn't have cancer or he does but now there's a cure.
Christ opened wide the door to heaven.
Laugh like children at Disneyland's gates. This world is owned by God and He'll return to rule.
Laugh like a man who walks away uninjured from a wreck in which his car was totaled.
Laugh as if all the people in the whole world were invited to a picnic and then invite them.”*
[Joseph Bayly in “*Psalms of My Life,*” Christianity Today magazine (Vol. 34, No. 6)].