

Here we are, Easter 2020, a time to see with perfect vision the love and hope that surrounds us and that connects us to God and to each other. That love and hope were made manifest years ago in Jesus Christ. That love and hope is embodied today by Christians and people of faith all over the world. (Can you see the love and the hope all around?)

Love is the strongest bonding agent there is, but it's not made of anything tangible. Hope encourages. It helps us cope and more, it's a significant factor in changing circumstances. (Can you feel the connection and the encouragement stemming from love and hope?)

As surely as we can feel uncertain about many things today, we can absolutely feel certain that there is more to life (and eternal life) than we can know or understand at this time. We have only to look at creation to see a sense of new growth and hope all around us. Life springs forward from empty space. Flowers burst forth from bare ground and buds appear on trees that have shown no sign of life over a long Maine winter.

It's appropriate that the setting for our Bible passage is a garden. If we go back to the very beginning, we remember the story: God created Adam and Eve and set them in a garden. That garden represented Paradise and God was the gardener. And here is Jesus, in a garden. In fact, Mary mistakes him for a gardener! In this garden, a tomb has been cut into a wall. It would have had a giant stone in front of it to seal the entrance, but when Mary gets there, the stone has been rolled away.

There are a few people in this account, but it's only Mary that really takes us into the story by sharing emotion. She doesn't matter-of-factly peek into the tomb and go on her way. She's weeping. Pausing. Turning. Questioning. She is processing what she's going through.

It was a custom in those times to anoint a body and she went out to do this for Jesus. We know that she went in darkness. Maybe she couldn't sleep. (If you're waking up in the middle of the night these days, you know the feeling!) Maybe she desperately wanted to be productive. Jesus had been Crucified and her normal routine of 'discipleship' had come to a shocking halt. There was little else she could do for Jesus.

You may feel as though you're less productive than usual in this time. You may feel in the dark...without answers...grieving... Where are you looking for comfort? In that which is familiar. In people who understand what you're going through. Mary may have been hoping to receive some comfort just by seeing Jesus, but his body wasn't in the tomb, so she runs to share this news with the others who will understand how she feels.

We expect that the darkness speaks to a time before daybreak, but it also undoubtedly speaks to Mary's emotional and spiritual condition. We know that darkness dissipates with the dawn and we call Jesus the Light of the World. (The light will make the darkness disappear. You will be able see and function clearly again!)

The other disciples come to the tomb and we're told that they go back to where they were staying. That may have some significance. It probably refers to a dwelling, but possibly even more. Their teacher and friend had just been executed. They may have thought they were next. Maybe it means that they go back to that place of sadness and fear. Mary doesn't go there.

Instead, she concentrates on that place where she believed Jesus would be. And she encounters angels. They ask, 'why are you weeping' and she answers that she doesn't know where Jesus is. And then, she turns away from them and toward Jesus...but she doesn't recognize him at first.

He asks her why she's weeping and for whom she's looking, but she doesn't answer him. She's so preoccupied with her mission to find Jesus that she fails to recognize him right in front of her. And so he demonstrates that he knows her even if she doesn't appear to know him. He calls her by name and she realizes that this is Christ. (She reaches for him, and, in an oddly appropriate way for these times, he says, something like 'don't touch me'.)

The first word out of her mouth is 'teacher'. That signals to me that this is a lesson for us. She's just learned that there is more to life and eternal life than she thought. Each of us has had many teachers. Life is probably teaching us valuable lessons right now.

Each of us has probably had an experience before where there's been some kind of loss or dramatic shift in worldview whether it was associated with the Moon Landing or President Kennedy, Martin Luther King, or 9/11 or with a job or relationship.

We've also had some amazing positive shifts through the birth of children, new jobs, trips to the country your parents came from, or even the first time you used Skype or Zoom! All of a sudden, there are new possibilities!

Even though you were experiencing something new and you may not have mastered it, did you have a sense of hope? Do you now? What are you learning about the world, your life, our systems, and your priorities?

Mary was changed for seeing Jesus. The disciples were changed because of her experience. We are those disciples today. You, too, can be changed by knowing that He lives and because he does, you can too. You can live fully here and now in every moment! You can your own Resurrection time—a time of getting back up after life has made you stumble.

If there is anything that you would like to change in your life, Easter is a perfect time for that new beginning. Whether it's that you'd like to let go of old habits... are ready to stop using substances, or want to end cycles of anger, or you'd like to reconnect with a family member, or you want to let go of old ways and turn over a new leaf, I invite you to take God into your heart. Know that with God, all things are possible. You can be strong and confident. You can heal and be happy.

On Easter, Jesus isn't in the tomb. Where is Jesus? Anywhere people are cured and restored back into community. Where is Jesus? Anywhere people are weeping, due to fear, frustration,

or loss. Where is Jesus? alive in kindness, compassion, forgiveness, honor, patience, and love. Where is Jesus? Where he's always been: in heaven and on earth. The Easter story speaks to the impermanence of life and the permanence of love.

We each have a moment right now to stand in front of the empty tomb, to hear the words, 'why are you weeping?' and to know that we are known to God, by name. Have hope, people of God. This isn't the end. Praise God for that! Many say, "I'll see it when I believe it." To that, I'll quote one of my favorite teachers, Dr. Wayne Dyer, "You'll see it when you believe it."

The ritual that brought Mary to the empty tomb was initially intended to bring some closure, but instead it opened her mind. At Easter, Jesus asks no less of you. Open your mind and your heart to possibility. Not just that things will get back to the way they were, but that when we emerge from this time in our homes, and familiar things appear different, it's not the end, but only a new beginning. Blessed be and amen.