

04/01/2018 ~ Resurrection of the Christ ~ April 1, 2018 ~ Easter Day ~ *Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or Mark 16:1-8; NOTE USED: 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 [ILV], John 20:1-18.

Resurrections

“...Mary ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple—the one whom Jesus loved—and said, ‘The Rabbi has been taken from of the tomb! We do not know where they have put Jesus.’” — John 20:2.

The sky was the first to know about the approaching sun. The sky itself seemed to sense what was happening *as* it happened.

There was a shade of brightness, brighter than the dense core of night. But in the early Spring the sky still displayed vestiges of that hardened core. Winter was tenacious. It had not yet been fully overcome.

But in Winter it is not just that night has a dense feeling. It seems to be drawn out and to go on for an excruciatingly long time. And then... and then... as Winter slowly passes into spring the sky seems to move, move as if it becomes empowered to paint new pictures on the face of the earth.

And so, as *that* breath of new Spring light happened in the sky and as night turned to day, perhaps because of some internal mechanism or because she had a sense of *that* moment, that moment of new light, the eyes of Mary of Magdala were suddenly open. And yes, this same thing happened to her nearly every morning at pretty much the same time.

Just as the sky knew morning was approaching so did she. It was always hard for her to fall asleep again after that.

But today— today seemed a little different to her. She did not know what that was about— that this day felt different.

But she did understand why she woke up nearly every day exactly when the sky started to turn. This cycle of sensing a new day started right after her friend, the Rabbi, had been executed by the State. That was, of course, some thirty years ago now.

As she rested in her bed and stared at the ceiling she suddenly realized it *had* been nearly thirty years to the day. Yes, it *had* happened in the Spring. And yes, it *was* around the

feast known as *Pesach*, Passover.

Of course, the story— her story, her involvement in it— did not end with the execution. Yes, she had seen the execution with her own eyes. And yes, just three days later she saw Jesus again... and then again... and then again.

And so every day she woke up at what some might call the crack of dawn. Mary believed this was *exactly* the time she had set out to visit the tomb.

Even now, all these years later, part of her could not make logical sense of what had happened all those years ago. Yes, the Rabbi died. And yet the Rabbi was with them. (Slight pause.)

There was a knock on the door. She put her feet on the floor and stood. Mary could hear two men speaking. “Peter and John,” she thought. “Here already.”

“Come ahead,” she shouted.

Rusty hinges creaked and the heavy door to her house swung open. Two men entered. Peter called out, “Good morning Mags!” Her close friends called her Mags because she was from Magdala.

“You’re early,” she said. “The markets will not yet be open. We will not be able get food for *Pesach*, the Passover meal, at this time of day.”

Peter, the older of the two, smiled knowingly. “Yes, *Pesach*.” (Slight pause.) “You do know what today is, Mags, do you not?”

“The Day of Passover begins when the sun sets,” she said.

“Yes,” John allowed. “That too.”

“There’s something else?” she asked. “What’s more important than *Pesach*.”

Peter sighed. “You do know it *is* thirty years to the day.”

Mags let out a sigh, then responded. “I knew it was around this time. So then, it’s thirty years since the Rabbi died.”

John reached out and touched her shoulder. “No, Mags. It’s thirty years since the *third*

day, thirty years since Jesus was suddenly with us.”

“No. I should have known. I often wake up when the sky begins to brighten. That is exactly the same time I woke up and went to the tomb. But today, when my eyes opened, today seemed different. And today is different. I should have known.”

“Well,” said Peter, “we do need to remember Jesus is still with us. Jesus walks with us every day.”

Then John spoke. “I think that is a piece of the covenant promise. It is not just that the Rabbi lives. It is that we shall also live. God is with us. God walks with us. God surrounds us with love each day of our lives.” (Slight pause.)

There was a long silence, as if they were taking in the reality, the feelings John had turned into words. Finally Mags spoke. “I’ll never forget that first time I knew Jesus was standing there, with me.”

“I had gone to the tomb. You both followed but then you both left. I suddenly realized the Rabbi stood there— right there in front of me— and very clearly said, ‘Do not hold on to me,...’”

“I also remember after that, after Jesus returned, none of us ever did reach out and touch the Rabbi. But Jesus was there, with us, present. The fact of that presence— that Jesus was with us— was overwhelming. And yes, the presence of Jesus was just like it had been, just as real as it had been before the execution.” (Slight pause.)

Again there was a long silence, as if they were all taking in the reality Mags had expressed, what Mags had turned into words.

“Perhaps that’s why I wake up when I do,” allowed Mags. “You see I left for the tomb when light began to glow in the sky.”

Once again there was silence. Then once again Mags spoke to Peter and John. “Perhaps because of that presence, the reality of it, I understand the resurrection *is* real, a part of the promise of covenant.”

“And yes, I wake with the light but the light I really know about, the light that is in every fiber of my being is the light of God, the light of the Rabbi, the light of Jesus, the light of Christ, the light of the promise of God shining out in the deepest night. And that promise, the light *of* that promise that promise of God shining out in the deepest night, is

that promise of new light, new life, a promise of resurrection for all of us.” (Slight pause.)

Peter and John stood there silently and simply nodded. Then Peter said, “Yes, the promise of new light, new life, a promise of resurrection *is* for all of us.” (Slight pause.)

There was again a long silence. Then John said, “Yes, the promise of new light, new life, a promise of resurrection *is* for all... of... us... always.” Mags... simply... nodded. (Pause.) Amen.

04/01/2018 ~ Easter Sunday

United Church of Christ, First Congregational, Norwich, New York

ENDPIECE: It is the practice of the Pastor to speak after the Closing Hymn, but before the Choral Response and Benediction. This is an précis of what was said: “I need to say two things: first, in Aramaic, the language which would have been spoken in Roman Palestine in New Testament times, to be saved meant to be made alive. Second, I am sure the well known American composer Irving Berlin was a nice fellow. He wrote *Easter Parade* and also a lesser known Easter Song, *It’s a Lovely Day, Happy Easter*. I want to suggest, however, that to merely say, ‘Happy Easter’ is not a Christian sentiment. So, let me make a suggestion: if someone walks up to you today and says, ‘Happy Easter’ shake their hand and say, ‘Christ is risen.’ ‘Christ is risen’ is the Christian sentiment.”

BENEDICTION: Hear now this blessing and then please join with me in the responsive Easter acclamation found in the bulletin. May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the love of Christ, Jesus, and in the knowledge of the Holy Spirit this day and forever. And please join with me in the Easter Acclamation.

ONE: Rejoice, people of God! Christ is risen from the dead! Go in peace to love and serve God. Christ is with you always. Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

MANY: Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia