



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE VERY REV. STEVEN L. THOMASON, DEAN AND RECTOR  
GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 12, 2020  
ACTS 10:34-43; COLOSSIANS 3:1-4; JOHN 20:1-18

## WHOLEHEARTED LIVING

**John 20:1-18** *[Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.]*

Happy Easter!

Well, the social media memes have had some fun this week, anticipating this day of celebration.

One goes like this: "Jesus was a rule-breaker. Otherwise, he would have sheltered in place, and remained in the tomb."

But we might cut Jesus some slack, because in the gospel reading, he embraces the directive of social distancing on his morning walk in

the garden when he tells Mary Magdalene, “Don’t touch me!”

All jesting aside, perhaps it needs to be said, especially this year, that there is no arriving at our altars of Easter delight without having passed through the valley of Lenten loss first, whatever shape that takes for each of us.

I live with an artist who tells me often that “light” is only registered by our brains as lightness because it is framed by contrasting shadows. So, let’s name the wisdom of this day: Life is difficult, and a full engagement of Easter requires the layered paradoxes of life to be held in tension and truth.

And yet we arrive to this day, expectant and yearning to claim the good news that God is in the mix of this life, even with all its troubles stirred in, because we were created to do so. I suspect some may ask “how can we possibly rejoice, and sing our Easter alleluias, and proclaim resurrection joy to the world, when we also grieve all the losses we are experiencing?”

I’ve been thinking a lot about this question in recent weeks, in light of our current plight, which is global in scope. We are in this together, all connected, a global reality. There’s a gift in that really, to view this from a perspective that encompasses the whole of earth.

What evolutionary biologists and neuropsychologists know, and we might do well to consider in this moment, is that there is a resilience to the human spirit—that in the face of stress and loss, we have a native

tendency to find a path forward even when grieving. Practicing resilience doesn’t deny the loss, but it strikes a new existence shaped by that loss, in ways that allow for seemingly disparate emotions to co-exist—joy and sadness, gratefulness and loneliness, and so forth.

Resilience is not about going it alone, or about denying one’s true feelings, or pretending to be alright when we’re not. Resilience is about practicing joy, delight, gratitude, and the like, even while holding the weight of life’s slings and arrows as well. This is the heart of resurrection—a both-and way of being. We can do this—celebrate Easter joy even while grieving, too.<sup>i</sup>

I’ve been reading recently about a nascent field of physics known as “Loop quantum gravity theory.” I think it has something to say to us this Easter day. Italian physicist Carol Rovelli is a leader in this field, which is attempting to reconcile the contradictions between Einstein’s theory of general relativity and modern quantum mechanics. No small feat! He’s written a little book entitled *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*, which beautifully teases out the science using philosophical and poetic metaphors, and I think he is on to something.<sup>ii</sup>

I will spare you my feeble explanation of Einstein’s theory of general relativity or quantum mechanics here—perhaps we can do that in a forum when we are all back together in the building, because they offer rich theological soil in their own right—I’ve got energy for that... but for now, let me

simply say that relativity addresses the cosmic scope of space and time, while quantum theory delves into the elementary subatomic particles that make up that universe. Global and individual...

Carlo Rovelli is attempting to bring those two theories together in ways that make sense. It's a fascinating consideration in which he says all reality is interaction. That's the take-home—all reality is interaction.

But to “see” that, we must be willing to consider a perspective much broader than we normally are inclined to. He uses a stone and a kiss to make this point:

We say a stone is a definable “thing” because it remains equal to itself. A stone is a stone because it was a stone yesterday and will be still a stone tomorrow. It remains equal to itself.

A “happening” on the other hand is something that does not remain equal to itself. So, a kiss, for example, is a happening because it doesn't make sense to ask tomorrow, where is the kiss? It happened because an interaction occurred, and it changed reality, but it is not a “thing” that remains equal to itself. That doesn't compute. But it is no less real—this kiss, this happening.

But what if we were to change our perspective? Again, think global, or even cosmically.

We think of a stone as a thing because we humans live less than a hundred years, and that is our perspective. But if we lived a billion

years, then we would be able to see the stone as a happening also—grains of sand pressed together to form the aggregate rock, then crumbled again into dust. The stone happened—it wasn't, then it was, then it wasn't again. Time is referential to one's perspective and relation to the other. And it is the interaction, the happening, that makes it real.

Rovelli suggests that all reality is interaction, because the universe is made up of “happenings,” not things. To see this, we must broaden our perspective of time, and be open to considering that the universe is made up of particles a billion times smaller than atoms that interact. And everything we know, including ourselves, are the result of these interactions.<sup>iii</sup>

Here's how Rovelli describes it: “...elementary particles which vibrate and fluctuate constantly between existence and non-existence and swarm in space, even when it seems nothing is there, combine together to infinity like the letters of a cosmic alphabet to tell the immense history of galaxies... of sunlight, of mountain, woods, and fields of grain, of the smiling faces of the young at parties, and of the night sky studded with stars.”

It's a beautiful image to consider as we contemplate our current global and individual circumstances.

We need time to help us make sense of our limited lives here and now, focused down to a segment we can grab hold of, but when we expand our horizon to consider the universe,

such a narrow concept of time loses its linear and dimensional constraints, and it is there, in the realm of infinite potentiality that resurrection happens. It is real, even if we cannot fully grasp it in the context of our narrow existence.

As people of faith, who think in theological terms as well, I hope we see resurrection as more than an event that occurred once within the confines of mortal time and space to a Palestinian named Jesus. We can only see the cosmic implications of that resurrection when we broaden our perspective, and claim that this resurrected Christ was, and is, and is yet to be—Alpha and Omega, a cosmic alphabet speaking the Word of grace and truth across eternity.

What if we were to envision resurrection as the very grounding of reality, because at its heart it is the interaction of spirit and flesh, light and dark, betrayal and forgiveness, Word and silence, life and death. None of these seeming dualisms make any sense without the other—they are both—and invitations for us to open our eyes and broaden our perspective to see that we exist within the cosmic realm of happenings.<sup>iv</sup>

What this means for us, if we do, is that we might just catch a glimpse of these resurrection interactions as gifts appearing in our midst, right here and now, evoking joy and delight, and gratefulness, even while we grieve.

Can you see it happening?

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<sup>i</sup> For more on the field of resilience, investigate Columbia University researcher George Bonanno.

<sup>ii</sup> Rovelli also gives a good interview to Krista Tippett <https://onbeing.org/programs/carlo-rovelli-all-reality-is-interaction/>

<sup>iii</sup> While beyond the scope of the sermon, it is worth reading about loop quantum theory's notion of "grains of space." When taken ad infinitum, the theory also postulates no time at all.

<sup>iv</sup> It is important to note that none of this thought experiment diminishes in any way the significance of Christ's resurrection as an historical event (which I wholeheartedly believe to be true), but it is also at the same time a cosmic event that stands outside the bounds of time. Hence, the Creeds speak of him descending to hell, and sitting on the throne in heaven—all timeless aspects of his resurrection gift to the world.



SAINT MARK'S  
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL