

*Love comes again, that with the dead has been – love is come again like wheat that springeth green.
Amen.*

What did Mary go to that tomb looking to find?

The lifeless body of a friend she loved?

Some solace in the familiar rituals of preparing a body for burial?

She was prepared for death – prepared for rigor mortis, for decay,
for a stench already beginning to curdle the air. She was ready to find death.
She was not looking for life, life where it could not possibly be.
So she did not see Jesus, not at first.

Sure, there must have been something different about his resurrected form –
he often wasn't recognized until he did something recognizable.

said the name, broke the bread, did a miracle

But the bigger obstacle was that he was impossible.

The other gospel accounts, in which there were other women with Mary,
tell us they were terrified. As Esau McCaulley wrote in an op-ed this weekend,
"Easter is a frightening prospect. For the women, the only thing more
terrifying than a world with Jesus dead was one in which he was alive."

Are we ready for this life? Are we ready for God-Life?

What did we come here looking to find?

At the tomb, on Zoom, perhaps for the first time back at our familiar church?

We've been taught by our faith to say we came looking for life –

But are we? After the year we've just had, can we still believe in life?

The word that has been lingering in my mind for weeks is "emergence."

Emergence is a spring word. We see it all around us – daffodils and crocuses,
birds returning to familiar places, dead limbs leafing into bud.

And this year, in this part of the world, anyway, where vaccines have been
more available than in others, we are experiencing emergence –
back to the embrace of grandchildren; back to restaurants; back to life.
After the year we've just had we might be more wired for life than before.

But this God-life Jesus invites us into; this life he came that we might have in
abundance; is not just family and fun. This life emerges from death.

Chicks don't hop out fully formed – they have to break their shells to emerge.
Butterflies can't skip the cocoon stage.
Daffodils didn't start out in full bloom; they were planted in cold earth.
Jesus had to pass through death into eternal life.
And that is a journey on which he is ever inviting us to join him.
When we give ourselves to that journey, as we allow ourselves to be
broken open so that God's life can pour out of us,
then we truly experience the life of God, the life worth dying for.

I was once at a retreat where we had to find objects from nature
and see how they spoke to us of God. I went out looking, and I found
this little branch about a foot long, that was broken on both ends.
This little branch spoke volumes to me about God:
It was broken, but I could not break it further – broken and unbreakable.
It was creation. It was the wood of the cross.
It was mystery covered in bark – I couldn't see its insides, only the outside.
It had two little nubs on it that looked like once buds had been there;
it spoke of life.

Well, after the retreat I got it in my head to put this thing in water and see if those
nubs would generate leaves. My pastor begged me not to – he thought I was
going to be disappointed and lose my faith, because this branch was really dead!
But I stuck it in a plastic water glass on my desk.
And after a few weeks, a tiny bit of green appeared on one of the nubs.
And then the nubs got bigger, and greener.
Then a little tiny bit of a leaf appeared on one. And in about three weeks,
there were two clumps of leaves on that dead little branch,
cut off as it was from its tree, dead as it had been. There was life.
I think God gave me that to remind me that new life comes out of dead things.
This was in the year after my sister had died, after a difficult and sad life.
It was a year I had been turned down for ordination.
I needed to remember to look for life.
That branch spoke of God, and kept on speaking.

Friends, we are that branch, emerging from the loss and dislocation of this year.
Jesus invites us to make this journey with him.
Can we pass with him through the dark of the grave,
in the dark earth where he said a seed must dwell if its life is to emerge?

We do that in many ways – we do that when we subdue our privileges and prerogatives so that someone else might thrive; we do that in families, and that is part of the work of racial justice we are called to, ensuring that all our privileges are equally shared.

We pass through death when we follow Jesus' command to love our enemies – man, talk about death!

To relinquish our right to be right, to love when people hurt us?

We can only do that with the life of God coursing through our veins.

And that is what we need if we are to be peacemakers, reconcilers, healers of the terrible divisions in our world, in our nation, in our communities.

Can we let God change the way our churches operate, break ourselves open so more people can find life with us?

This past year has given us a jump start; now we need to go further, into the discomfort of letting our spiritual selves be present in all our interactions, inviting people in the rest of our lives to experience the joyful, crazy love of God. If we don't invite them, they may never get this gift.

In that garden, Jesus offered Mary life.

He invited her to let go of her expectations of death, to look for life.

Today in this garden, Jesus offers us the same invitation –

to allow what needs to die to die, so that our true selves might emerge into the glorious Son-light flooding from that empty tomb.

So that we think and speak and live as those disciples Jesus asks us to be.

So that we preach and heal and give life as the apostles Jesus wants us to be.

This is Life that does not skip the death – it transcends it,

And Jesus is transcending it in us every moment.

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!