

Mary Magdalene arrives first.

Joanna and Mary—the mother of James—join her minutes later. Finally, just as the night is about to give way to day, the rest of the women arrive—to the well that is.

Not long after Joseph and Nicodemus had placed Jesus’ body in the tomb on Friday, the women had agreed that they would meet after the Sabbath to tend to his body as was their custom. So, with their baskets of spices and rubbing cloths and weighed down by grief, they make their way to Jesus’ tomb. Three or four minutes into their walk, one of them breaks the silence: “Remember, when one of the guys tried to tell us that our place was in the kitchen and Jesus told him he needed to mind his own business?”

A few of them laugh, and Joanna pipes up: “Oh, I definitely remember that.” Soon their laughter gives way to a heavy silence as they remember why they’re even together this morning: they’re on their way to anoint Jesus’ body, Jesus’ *dead* body. This isn’t the first time that reality has punched them in the gut like this, but the pain and shock still stops them in their tracks. Never have they loved someone so much. Never have—*had*—their relationships, their future, their sense of purpose ever taken on such deep and life-giving meaning. And then...then it was just over. Just the thought of those last days—the trial, the walk to Calvary, the nails, the agonizing breaths—makes it hard to breathe. They press on in silence, feeling the crunch of the dirt with every step they take, soaking up the mystery and wonder of it all.

As they near the tomb, Joanna is the first to notice the missing stone in front of the cave, but she’s too stunned to do anything. Fearing the worst, Mary Magdalene rushes past her. Seeing no body, she cries and crumbles to the ground. “Wasn’t killing him enough?” She wails. “Did they have to go and steal his body, too?”

As the other women rush in, two men in white—so crisp and bright that it hurts—stand before them. Before the women have time to figure out from whence they’ve come, one of them pointedly asks: “Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

“Living? We’re here to tend to Jesus’ dead body.” Mary Magdalene explains. “Don’t you remember what Jesus told you when y’all were in Galilee?” One of the men asks? “Jesus said that his enemies were going to execute the Son of God, but three days later he would rise again. Well, he is the Son of God. This is no joke.”

Slowly they remember—the healings, the meals, the miracles, the teachings—they were all pointing to this very moment of victory. “He’s risen. He’s really risen,” James’ mother says. The others stand in shock, staring at one another.

“You know what?” one of them says pointedly. “I think that love Jesus talked about *actually* got the last word over death.”

“This changes everything.”

Barely able to contain themselves, they rush off to tell the guys.

“They won’t believe it!” Mary Magdalene says.

She’s right. They won’t believe it.

She didn’t. Not at first.

Would you?

### **Better yet, *do you?***

I’m not talking about whether you believe the resurrection happened 2,000 years ago. I’m talking about resurrection in your life today. I do not know all of the details of your circumstances this morning, but I know that when it comes to a lot of things our lives, we think we know how things are *supposed* to go. When they don’t go according to plan, there are some who are ready to hatch out a plan to fix it and others who want to fall to their knees.

I know that like Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and the others, the weight of loss and grief—of unmet expectations, broken promises, lost beloveds, and unfulfilled plans for ourselves and our loved ones—can leave us fumbling amidst the loss of how we think things *should* be and unable to imagine that possibilities and new life await you.

I know that being imprisoned by a job and the lifestyle its affords can dead your soul and rob you of a sense of goodness.

I know that death is not limited to the grave and imprisonment to barbed wire and jail bars when you’re afraid, anxious, or unsure of your next meal.

I know how easy it is to go through life expecting the sorrow and finality that Mary Magdalene and the women feel this morning to be your present *and* your future.

I know that, but I also **know** this: What happened 2,000 years ago isn't a mere historical event that happened to one God-man in the Middle East.

What happened 2,000 years ago is the promise of our present and the hope of our destiny. **The worst thing that happens in our lives is not the last thing. The end is the beginning.**

Easter is not a neat, tidy answer to the end of Jesus' story. It's the invitation to see and experience possibilities and new life where grief, despair, and uncertainty say throw in the towel. No, the resurrection doesn't erase the realities and heartaches of life, but it reminds us **they will not define or be the sum total of our lives.**

Like the women, you may believe that "there is no place to go but here, and if you can't do anything about our situation then nobody can."<sup>1</sup> Just as it did for them: the resurrection invites you to remember the past not as something that must be preserved but as confirmation of all the all the ways God has been faithful to you. *That*—and not positive or wishful thinking—is the basis of our hope.

Today reminds us that each day is an opportunity to put one front in front of the other and open ourselves to be changed and transformed, to learn more about love and grace than we thought possible knowing that Love—God's love for you and this creation— can not be silenced or destroyed.

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Although 20 years have passed since the genocide and war in the Balkans—a war one person described as a period when "the very definition of 'human' was in question"<sup>2</sup>—people in that region still remember the music that saved their soul and gave them hope amidst death. On May 27, 1992, hoards of people stood in line at the Sarajevo's only bakery desperate for even a morsel of flour with which they could make bread. At 4:00 p.m., 22 of them were killed when a bomb dropped where they were standing. Cellist Vedran Smailovic had been sitting on his balcony that afternoon and saw it unfold.

When, on the next day he saw people lined up knowing they very well could be decimated at a moment's notice, he realized that they had long given up expecting any kind of life beyond the ravages of war. Instead, they expected to die. Indeed, some of them may have just wanted to get it over with.

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<sup>1</sup> Joan D. Chittister, *Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 107.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

That's when Vedran put on the formal black suit he wore for his performances with the nation's national opera and headed to very spot where the bomb had denoted the day before. Trapped in a city captured by Serbian nationalists, "surrounded by debris and the remnants of death and the despair of the living, he began to play Albinoni's Adagio in G Major."

The next day he did it again.

And again.

And again.

22 days for the 22 people killed there.

Danger be damned. The threat of armed soldiers could not keep this good man down.

In the midst of smoldering rubble, as tears fell, stomachs grumbled, and boots crushed, Vedran's music stirred the memory and hope of a people who had long since believed their lives and souls would—or more honestly, *should*—heal. Out of the darkness of death, Vedran brought forth the light of life.

Vedran's truth was Mary Magdalene truth and Joanna's truth. It is also your truth, too. God is always composing symphonies of glory out of the rubble and cacophony of our lives.

**The worst thing is not the last thing.**

**The end is the beginning.**

Christ is risen.

It's time for you to rise to the occasion with him.

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