

“Love Lives Forever”

Colossians 3:1-4; Matthew 28:1-10

The Resurrection of the Lord, Easter Day, April 5, 2026

Woodbury United Methodist Church, Woodbury, Connecticut

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Easter’s message is that God’s love lives forever. In the face of death – in the very place of death – new life springs from the love of God that will not be extinguished. Love lives forever!

Some years ago (1) Jennifer Rodia told what happened one Easter Sunday in her church, Providence United Methodist Church in Mount Juliet, Tennessee. The pastor was setting up the Easter proclamation by saying *“Jesus died.”* Suddenly, Rodia’s son, five year old Lukas, blurts out, *“Jesus died?!?”* A kid in the row ahead of Lukas turned around and said, *“It’s okay. He’s better now.”* Love lives forever!

A parishioner whose grandmother had died some time before once said to me, *“I got a note from my grandma.”* Curious, I asked what she meant. *“Well, I get a lovely note each month from my grandma.”* She went on to say that her grandmother held stock in a company that paid monthly dividends, stock she bequeathed to her grandchildren. So there it was, month after month: a reminder of a grandma’s love for her grandchildren. As long as that company is in business and those stocks have value, the love notes will keep coming. Love lives forever!

In the same way, God’s love reaches from beyond time and space to open new horizons and plan new beginnings for each of us. When Jesus says in today’s Gospel to the two Mary’s, *“Do not be afraid,”* he gives the power of love that lasts forever.

Sure, some folks struggle with Easter and the resurrection. On any given Sunday there is doubt in one person or another. I don’t make light of that. Only you and God know the fullness of your story, the hurts and trials that stand between you and this love that God freely gives again and again. But I do marvel that some of us, who receive our dividend checks without a thought; blessings without questions (or, possibly, even without gratitude); who never question that spring will arrive or the blooming of the crocus’ and the daffodils: these same folks will struggle with the God who makes these things happen and is the source of the power of love that lives forever.

(1) *“The Interpreter”* magazine, April, 2014.

Maybe that's because "forever" is a long time. We know too well love's labors lost; human love fading and frail; promises made and broken. We often say "*Nothing lasts forever*," a reflection of the inability of our finite minds to comprehend the magnitude of an infinite gift.

But God's love lives forever. In South Africa over a quarter century ago, the nation was under a state of emergency. Negotiations for a peaceful dismantling of *apartheid*, racial separation, had broken down. Anti-apartheid activists had been arrested and a state of violence and terror gripped the nation. In the midst of this, Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in a worship service, shouted to all the enforcers of apartheid: "*You have already lost. Come and join the winning side!*" Tutu thundered the Christian hope and claimed the transformative power of Resurrection: that victory over hate and human degradation had already been won through the love of Christ.

This is not a message everyone wants to know. Not everyone **wants** to know that love lives forever, or South Africa's Pollsmoor Prison and Robben Island would not have been home to Nelson Mandela for 27 years before *apartheid* was finally dismantled. Not everyone wants to know that love lives forever, or the capricious and cruel immigration "enforcement" that is willing to kill American citizens under the guise of "law and order" would find more resistance. We need to say to those who have forgotten our common humanity, "*You have already lost. Come and join the winning side.*"

Not everyone **knows** that love lives forever. The women who went to the tomb in today's Gospel were not "*looking for love in all the wrong places*," they weren't looking for love at all. They were, we suppose, going as you or I might go to the grave of a loved one: to do the right thing, to leave flowers there, to remember what once was, to ease the pangs of grief.

So what a fright that earthquake must have been! I've only been in one earthquake, a 4.0 on the Richter scale: and I thought the boiler in the apartment I was staying in had blown up! Making it worse, it was the very first time I was away from my first child overnight. So I cannot imagine experiencing that and adding a heavenly messenger to the mix, notwithstanding their reassuring message "*Do not be afraid.*" But there it is in the Good Book.

So what do we do with this marvelous message that love lives forever, that Christ is victorious over sin and death? That's in the Good Book, too. Speaking of the women, Matthew writes:

So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" Matthew 28:8-9

How do these verses guide us? For we who are on this side of Easter but maybe struggling with its promise, these thoughts:

First, leave the tomb quickly. Whatever it is that has you captive and bound, leave it. Doubt, despair, destructive attitudes or values or behavior: leave that tomb quickly and don't look back.

Word has it that the UConn men's basketball team won last Sunday night. I was as glad and jubilant as anyone, in part because I am married to a UConn grad. Braylon Mullins three-point shot from deep behind the three point line with one second on the clock won the game, overcoming a 19 point deficit against Duke in the NCAA basketball tournament. But then my heart broke after learning that Cayden Boozer, the Duke freshman whose turnover set up UConn's winning shot said, *"I ruined our team's season. That's the best I can put it."* Oh, Cayden, no! Do not live in a self-made tomb. It was a team effort and a team loss, not made by one play but by many.

I shared with our Lenten study group that it reminded me of Red Sox first baseman Bill Buckner, whose missed ground ball in the 1986 World Series allowed the New York Mets with win Game 6 and go on to win the Series. Buckner rose above the infamy and became a motivational speaker in overcoming catastrophic life events. I pray something similar for Cayden.

The point for Easter: leave the tomb quickly. Whatever has you entombed, leave it.

Second, understand that – as with the women – fear **and** joy will be with us. Change can be frightening but we can be joyful because we know how the story ends. *Quo Vadis* is a Latin phrase that means *"Where are you going?"* or *"Wither thou goest?"* It comes from a tradition in which Peter, running away from martyrdom in Rome, encounters the Risen Jesus and asks *"Quo Vadis?"* Jesus replied, *"I am returning to Rome to be crucified again."* Tradition says this awakened courage in Peter, who did not want to be complicit in a second crucifixion of Jesus. Peter returned to Rome and completed his ministry which included his martyrdom.

In the 1951 movie *Quo Vadis*, Deborah Kerr plays the part of the girl almost devoured by lions let loose on Christians in the Roman arena. Asked if she was afraid when the lions were let loose she said, *"No, for I am one of those*

actresses who read the script through to the end, and I knew that Robert Taylor would rescue me in time." The tigers may be out of the cage but the Gladiator wins!

So, in the Gospel, the women left the tomb quickly, accompanied by fear and joy, and third, they ran to tell his disciples. We who have been given this promise of love that lives forever must tell someone. Tell someone about Christ. Tell someone how **your** life has been changed because of Christ. Tell someone you love them.

This is not as religious as it may sound. It's about sharing joy in faithful living. As someone has said, *"Telling people about Christ is one hungry person telling another where to find bread."*

As it so often is with witnessing about what we believe, it's really about how we live. During COVID-19 my wife's colleague, Debbie, had a father in hospice care. Knowing that his life was nearing its earthly end, the father got the family together to express his love for them and to give each of his daughters and granddaughters rings that were family heirlooms.

Debbie knew that her daughter, Laura, was about to be proposed to by her boyfriend, Brandon. Debbie took Brandon aside and told him this would be a great setting to propose, with everyone gathered together. But Brandon said that the ring he purchased was still in New York and that he could not get it because of COVID-19.

So Debbie suggested to Brandon that he could give that ring later, and that a family ring from generations past might convey his love just as well. So that's how it happened: Debbie's father, Stephen, preparing to go from earthly to eternal life, gives tokens from generations past in the form of family rings; and one of those rings becomes the engagement ring for his granddaughter. Even in the midst of the uncertainty of life-threatening illness and pandemic, love lives forever!

In the end, the women at the tomb meet the Risen Christ. *"Greetings!"* he says to them. *"He's better now,"* says Lukas' friend. God is not vanquished, but victor. God continues to shed the white-hot spotlight of love on the powers of darkness. God rolls away the stone to release us from our tombs. God in Christ loved us from the beginning and will love us until the end of this life and the beginning of the next and on into the glorious promise of life without end. Love lives forever. He is Risen, just as he said. Alleluia!