

# “While it Was Still Dark”

April 12, 2020 (Easter Sunday)

CoVid-19 wk 4

originally broadcast in the home of Pastor Alan & Wendy Bennett

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John 20: 1, 11-22

**Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!**

Jesus came to the disciples on the Emmaus road and turned their despair into hope. With joy in their hearts they returned to Jerusalem with the words

“Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed!”

As we gather this year in our homes, we celebrate Easter in a very strange way, with troubles and fears hovering nearby. May this time of worship be the place where we meet the Risen Christ and hope is reborn, and so

proclaim: **Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!**

## **John 20:1, 11-22**

*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. ... 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.*

*When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the*

*Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.*

### ***While it Was Still Dark***

I suppose it would be an understatement to say this was not how we were expecting Easter to happen. Even Donald Trump had hoped that we'd be celebrating Easter in a normal fashion. ☺

I expected that we'd be in the church with beautifully decorated flowers by Rosanne. I expected that the brass quartet would add that pomp and ceremony to the celebration of Easter. I expected sunshine – well maybe that's not fair but it's what I picture with Easter. I picture a beautiful spring day with not a cloud in the sky so that we can experience the fullness of the Easter Sunrise.

Instead the church is quiet and dark and cold, because we've shut off the heat. Instead of burning our prayers at the sunrise service we have a province wide fire ban because they don't want firefighters responding to unnecessary emergencies. Instead of singing together we are singing or not...separately.

Then again, the first Easter was not what anyone expected either. The scripture reading begins: “Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark...” *While it was still dark...* I really like that line. I like that someone started moving and doing something while it was still dark. Mary Magdalene in John's gospel didn't wait for the sun to be up brightly in the sky before setting out to see the place where Jesus lay. There is something hopeful sounding in that line: 'while it was still dark'. Still dark means it didn't stay that way.

Now of course it doesn't stay that way because as anyone who has grieved before knows, one of the strange and almost annoying things is that even if you are filled with grief and you feel like the whole world has changed and nothing will ever be normal again, nevertheless the sun still rises, the birds still chirp and the crocuses still push their way up through the soil as though everything was still normal. Of course it didn't stay dark, the sun always comes up whether we feel like it should or not.

But dark is how the story begins. The real dark for Mary and for the disciples had nothing to do with the night sky and the turning of the earth but everything to do with the brutal death of their Lord on Friday. The disciples didn't move far that first morning – instead they were in isolation, hiding in a room. They were too afraid to go outside and so they stayed

locked safely inside. I imagine if there were windows, they had the curtains closed. The first Easter starts in the dark.

Dark is how the story begins but it's not how it ends.

It seems to me we are closer to how Easter begins than we normally are. I'm sorry that things aren't how they usually are. I'm sorry that the church couldn't host that wonderful big community Easter dinner in the usual way or that I can't get together with the whole family to have a big dinner. But we have to remember that Easter isn't really about dinners or the Easter bunny, though I'm certainly pleased that Premier Doug Ford announced the Easter bunny along with the Tooth Fairy remain essential workers in this challenging time. But chocolate Easter eggs and flowers and music are not really the essence of Easter.

The heart of Easter is that it didn't stay dark! The heart of Easter is that Jesus went through death – not any peaceful “I've-lived-a-good-life-you-go-on-without-me” kind of death, but an unjust brutal killing of an innocent man at the prime of his life kind of death... and didn't stay there! He came back to life and broke the power of darkness and sin and death for all time and for everyone.

We are living in such a strange time with this world wide pandemic. People keep talking about an apocalypse. It's funny how that religious version of the end times has become so mainstream. There are all sorts of jokes about the outfit they thought they'd be wearing for the apocalypse and what they are actually wearing. How what they thought they'd be wearing is a bad ass armour - ready for anything, and the reality is they wear cute puppy pj's that you wear all day.



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the outfit I wanted to wear during the apocalypse / the one I'm wearing.



I remember reading a while ago an article that ranked St. John's N.L. the best Canadian city to survive a zombie apocalypse.<sup>1</sup> Edmonton was third and Ottawa came in 9<sup>th</sup> place. Brockville didn't make list. Bummer.

Why are zombies so talked about? I think there are 2 main reasons. The first is that that we have a sense we're not really living. Our lives get filled with work and errands and 'to do' lists and there seems to be less and less time for meaningful time with family, friends and community.

The other reason I think the zombie thing figures strangely prominently is that we have an under-current of fear and anxiety in our culture that seems to be growing. Events like this world wide pandemic, or wars and massive numbers of refugees, or threats of economic collapse, have caused general anxiety levels to rise. There is a loss of control and a sense of rising threats from all over. A Zombie Apocolypse is the ultimate fear of death. It's the fear of death taking over life and not a good 'rest in peace' kind of way but in an eternal no-life and no peace state.

Jesus has come to defeat the zombie apocalypse but it will not happen by running to the nearest military base and arming ourselves. No, it will come quietly and start while it's still dark. It will come as you have the courage to let the Risen Christ in your heart and so wake up and come alive.

What do we need to do? Well I encourage you if you can to be like Mary and to get up and move even though it's still dark, even though you are tired and afraid and grieving.

Martin Luther King Jr. used to tell the story of Sister Pollard, a seventy-year-old African American woman who lived in Montgomery, Alabama during the famous bus boycott. One day, after walking significant distances daily for several months, Sister Pollard was asked if she wanted a ride. When she answered, "No," the person responded, "But aren't you tired?" To which Sister Pollard answered, "My feets is tired, but my soul is rested."

But if you just can't be like Mary that's ok too, because Jesus didn't come back to life because of Mary's efforts. The disciples mostly stayed locked in a dark room, but Jesus came to them anyway; their fear and their isolation and their locked doors didn't stop the Lord of life from coming to them and giving them light and life.

Christ is risen and he is calling you to come to life too. It probably won't be dramatic at first. The kingdom always starts small looking at a tiny mustard or sunflower seed or the smallest glow of red on the dark eastern horizon. Look to the east, look to the Rising Son, and trust that the Son is rising for you.

Resurrection living means moving beyond our fears and trusting that is God is making a way where there seems to be no way. Resurrection living means holding on to the promise that a new world is unfolding. This will give such rest and life to our souls that we will be able to face all kinds of challenges and struggles along the way. "Our feet will be tired," but our spirits will be strengthened and live through the presence of the risen Christ. This is the good news we celebrate this Easter morning: There is no tragedy that God cannot redeem, no God given dream that Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life cannot energize and advance. Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed!

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<sup>i</sup> By Jana G. Pruden, Edmonton Journal April 8, 2014

### **Benediction**

Christ is risen...

Risen in a garden long ago but also today right here in your home.  
Go into the worries of your life with the light of life.

May the blessings of God the source of Life,  
of Christ Jesus the life incarnate,  
and the Holy Spirit Life's power, be with you today and forever!  
Hallelujah!