

Jubilation!

Jubilation! is the newsletter of Jubilee United Church
40 Underhill Drive * 416-447-6846 * www.jubileeunited.ca

Notes from Norm

In the last little while, three questions have dominated most of my conversations. I thought I'd do my best to answer them here for you.

What is Happening for Holy Week?

The first question most folk are asking me these days. This year, our shared Easter experience will be done virtually. **During the week of Holy Week (Monday-Friday, March 29-April 2), we will have a Daily Reflection.** Each morning by 8 a.m., I will post a 5 minute bit of scripture and some questions that come to mind when I read the passage. The invitation is for you to think about these questions during the day. There are no right or wrong answers, just an invitation to wonder. In the evening, at 6 p.m., I will host a 40-minute Zoom gathering and people can share their thoughts and tell us where their imagination has taken them during the day.



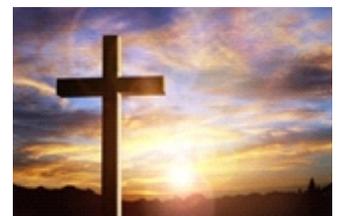
The Daily Reflection will be available on the Jubilee website, Jubilee Facebook page or by calling our audio service phone number (416)219-8749. The Zoom Link will be on the Jubilee website (www.jubileeunited.ca).



On Maundy Thursday (April 1), we will be remembering the Last Supper together via Zoom. You are invited to join me at 7 p.m. to share dinner. I really do hope that you bring your dinner and that we can eat together. As we eat, we will tell stories about the most memorable dinner of our lives. You will be invited to tell us about the time that you ate with someone famous or had a meal that changed your life, the quiet dinner with a dear relative or a loud birthday celebration that always stays close to your heart. We will then share the story of Jesus sharing the Last Supper with his closest companions. We will remember the story together and share in the breaking of the bread and pouring of the wine. (You are encouraged to have bread and juice available). In this way, we will remind ourselves that Jesus' story is our story, and we will prepare ourselves for both Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

On Good Friday (April 2), we will have a virtual service premiering at 10:30 a.m. Many of us will watch it together, but it will be available anytime after the original showing. The service will feature scripture, prayer, some preaching and, of course, music from our Jubilee musicians.

On Easter Sunday (April 4), there will be a short informal "SonRise" service available from 7 a.m. A simple telling of the story of Jesus' resurrection with music and prayer.



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On Easter Sunday at 10:30 a.m., we will celebrate Easter with music, visuals, scripture, preaching, and prayer. We will pull out all of the stops for Easter and hope that you will be able to join us at 10:30 a.m., but of course, the service will remain available from the link on the Jubilee website anytime you're ready for it.

Of course, we realize that there are some who do not have a computer or online access to our services. The Daily Meditations and Easter Sunday service will be available on our audio service. You can call (416)219-8749 to hear an edited version of the service played over the phone or the complete 5-minute meditation. Also, in this Jubilation, I offer complete reflections for both Good Friday and Easter Sunday. You may choose to read them on the appropriate days, reach out to God in prayer and know that God is always listening, always present, and the members of your Jubilee family are thinking and praying about the very same things. You are not alone.

When will we be open?

I wish that I had an easy answer to that question. Even as restrictions are lifting in and around Toronto, we are still concerned about the “Variants of Concern” and do not want to do anything that would jeopardize the health and well-being of our community. Some churches have taken a “Nobody comes back until we can all come back” approach and have declared that they will not meet in person until September or October. At present, Jubilee Trustees and Council are assessing each new development and potential for safe return. I am keenly following the news, the experiences of other churches across Canada, and the expressed hopes and concerns of our own community. It may be prudent and loving to wait until September to open, but we may also discover that we can be together sooner than that. We will watch to see how the vaccine rollout impacts our community and whatever else might come our way in the days and weeks ahead. I can confirm two things:

- 1. We all look forward to gathering together safely and joyfully.**
- 2. Every day, we do get closer to that time.**

We will keep you informed as that day approaches.

How will we replace Anne?

We won't. Don't worry; I'm not suggesting that we won't have another minister on staff, only that we can't replace Anne. At Jubilee, nobody is “replaceable”; we cherish the gifts of each person who comes to this community and particularly those in leadership. Anne's unique skills and the relationships that she developed and nurtured were gifts that she brought to us, and we are forever changed because of them. In the weeks and months ahead, we will be taking a long and considered look at what our community needs most in leadership and support. We will consider the gifts that Jordana, Bri-
anne, and Haley bring to us; we will consider ways that my work could change to meet the needs and ambitions of Jubilee. Then we will try to find the right combination of people, skills and passion that can help us be the community that we mean to be: a place where God is experienced at a personal level and God's love is shared publicly and fearlessly by those who call Jubilee home. We won't replace Anne, but we will continue to build on the gifts and love that she shared with us for the past five years, and we will take our next steps together.

And with that, I will close with the hope and faith that we will soon be together in person, but also the gratitude that even apart, we are together in spirit and in God's love.

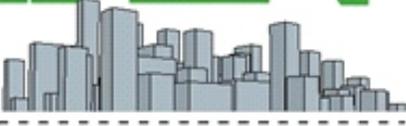
Norm



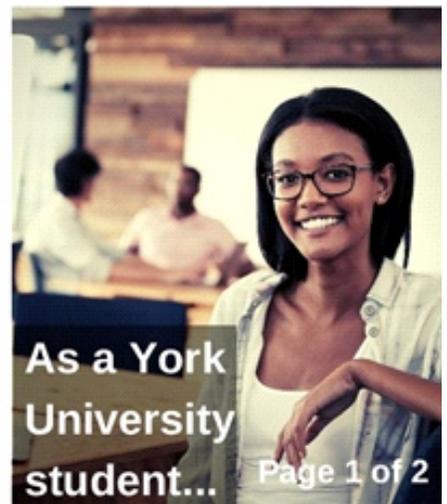
A PROJECT OF
JUBILEE
IMPACT

When I opened my business in Don Mills, my very first big client was a church called Jubilee...

HUMANS

of North York 

The 'Humans of North York' project is a COVID-friendly approach to getting to know our neighbours - and sharing what we're all about! We'll be learning, generously engaging with, and building partnerships in relation to the stories of our neighbours.



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Easy Ways to Get Involved

SHARE YOUR STORY.

We'd love to hear more about your life in North York and how you've been feeling lately. We'll be weaving your story into the story of the church and the community through online writing, photography, and other mediums. Let us know if you would be available to tell us your story!

LEARN A NEIGHBOUR'S STORY.

With permission, we'd love to share the story of interesting neighbours you may know - like that person you see at the dog park every morning or the long-time owner of your local green grocer. This is the perfect excuse to strike up a conversation. Let us know if they would like to share their story more broadly, with permission! If not, this is still a great opportunity to deepen your relationship.

MAKE A LIST OF INTERESTING JUBILEE FOLKS WHO WE SHOULD TALK TO.

Do you know folks in the Jubilee community who we should reach out to as part of this project? Let us know who they are and how we can get in touch!

MAKE A LIST OF INTERESTING LOCAL CHAMPIONS WHO WE SHOULD TALK TO.

Do you know local champions who we should reach out to as part of this project? Let us know who they are and how we can get in touch!



The Science of Living Longer

This article comes from an interesting publication by Time titled "The Science of Living Longer," and the article I have included below covers much of the findings in living well and living longer.

"There are surely a few reasons people who dwell on sun-kissed islands, subsisting on fresh fruit and locally grown vegetables, tend to live much longer than the rest of us. But as the science mounts, one thing has come into focus: you really don't need to become a snowbird or stow away to the other side of the earth in order to extract health benefits from the place you live. In fact, research shows that the healthiest place for people over 65 is wherever they've spent most of their adult lives. That's because geography (and genetics) only mean so much. Your social ties, how you make use of what's on offer in your neighbourhood, and even your budget all have an impact as well."

Church membership offers many benefits, including the opportunity for social interaction in one's community. As the article above suggests, social connections appear to offer the benefits of living well and living longer, according to this well-written publication. *Charlie Scott*

Virtual Holy Week @Jubilee United Church

Monday-Friday, 8am (watch anytime during the day)

Easter Meditation. 5 minutes of Scripture and a Question for day.

The meditation will be available on the Jubilee Website, FaceBook, Worship Phone and Youtube Channel.

Monday-Friday 6-640pm

Folks who have been considering the meditation that day, gather by Zoom to share their thoughts.

Maundy Thursday, April 1 at 7pm

A Zoom gathering during which we eat and share stories of memorable meals in our own lives as well as the story of the Last Supper. Each of us provides our own supper, bread and juice and the Spirit joins us together.

Zoom link will be on the Jubilee Website.

Good Friday. Scripture, Music, Words and Prayer to mark this day that we dare call "Good".

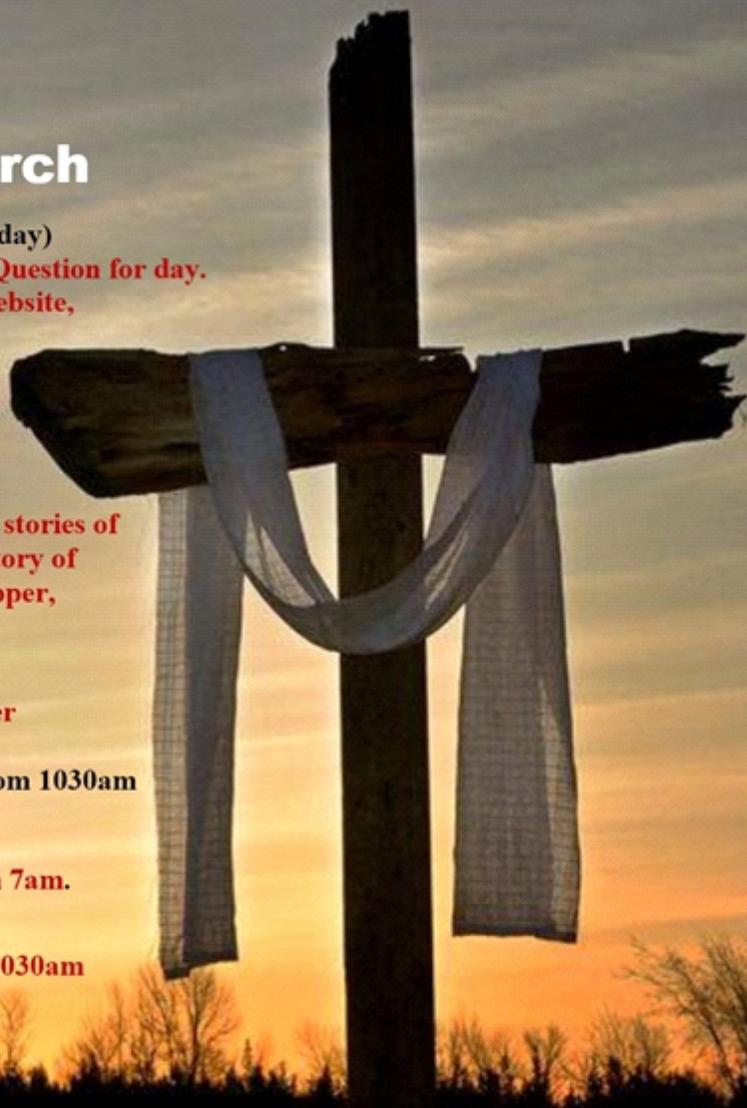
The service will be available on Friday, April 2 from 1030am

Easter Sunday – April 4

Informal "Son"Rise service available on-line from 7am.

Easter Service with Gospel, Music, Preaching and Joyous Celebration! Available on-line from 1030am

www.jubileeunited.ca



Life Events

Deaths:

Ruth Gorsline	November 3, 2020
Eileen Barclay	November 5, 2020
Maud Blair	November 12, 2020
Ernie Magee	December 5, 2020
Ed Forsyth	December 6, 2020
Nancy Rowe	January 18, 2021
Ed Rutherford	February 5, 2021

Outreach

As interim Chair of the Outreach Committee, I want to thank the many individuals who have continued their efforts to communicate with and care for different groups and projects that come under the Outreach umbrella. The past year has been challenging for everyone, and we are seeking new ways to be the face, hands, and feet of Jesus in our community. The community includes Jubilee, the local neighbourhood, and our global neighbours. In partnership with members of the Pastoral Care and Helping Hands teams, we will be reaching out to Jubilee members we have not been physically able to see for many months. Suggestions from Jubilee folks are always welcome.

Pam Lock

A Letter from Anne

[Jesus] also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” (Mark 4:30-32)

Dear Jubilee,

Many of you know that I have given notice to our Church Council that I am resigning from my position as Minister of word, sacrament, teaching, and pastoral care at Jubilee United Church and will not be returning after my current parental leave. My official end date is June 30, 2021. After careful consideration, my husband Max and I have decided to move our family out of the Greater Toronto Area. This summer, we will be making a new home in South River, Ontario. South River is a small town located off Highway 11, just about halfway between Huntsville and North Bay. I lived there as a teenager and still have close family and community ties in the area.

Some have asked what my plans are for ministry. I am not moving to a new church or ministry at this time. For now, my vocation is going to be focused on Eleanor, Rufino, and Catherine in their early years. I do, however, plan to offer pulpit supply whenever possible, and I look forward to moving back into church ministry when the time comes.

I want to thank you for sharing these last five years with me. I arrived at Jubilee as an intern in September of 2015. I am grateful to Norm, my internship committee made up Marg Lynn, Kathleen Moore, Charlie Scott, our dear Ed Rutherford, and to all of you for journeying with me through that gifted time of learning.

After my graduation and ordination in May of 2016, it was an honour to be invited to continue our pastoral relationship with an appointment, and eventually, a call to be part of your ministry team. Reflecting on these years, my head is full of images of picnics on the labyrinth, stacks of pancakes, Christmas Eve services, our weekly Sunday mornings together, wondering with the children, painting windows and cleaning windows with the youth and many others. Creating pancake church, building up Godly Play with Haley Brown, Hailey Clinton, Vivienne Wit, and Toni Cappelletti, as well as so many who furnished our Godly Play room with materials, leading worship services with Rev. Norm, Daniel, and the choir. Leading studies and small groups are all ministry moments that I am proud of and grateful for. I also thank you for the holy privilege of walking with you through some of the most difficult times in your own lives as you have experienced losses and other sorrows and for dancing with you through so many moments of joy. Through all of this, I am continually grateful for being part of the Jubilee team (past and present) with Barb Secord and Dianne Clare, Norm, Daniel, Pat Lansche, Jennine Profeta, Jason Meyers and now Bri-anne Swan and Jordana Wright, as well as, all who have served on the Church Council and other committees and all who are part of the Jubilee UC community. Norm and I have said this pretty often about our ministry partnership, but I think it is true of the ministry we have all shared: “There’s a reason Jesus sent them out in pairs...” Doing church is just better (and much more fun) when we are surrounded by the gifts of so many.

There is a moment that sticks out to me is from a worship service just as my ministry moved from internship into an appointment. I was telling the parable of the mustard seed, and you all joined in...as the story unfolded, we created a human tree down the aisle and through the lines of seats. Some flapped their wings to become the birds that came and made their nests in the branches of the tree, some were so kind as to make rather loud bird noises. It was beautiful and a little chaotic, and we were reminded that the kingdom of God is like this.

Telling God's stories with you, creating our story together is perhaps the greatest gift I will be bringing with me as I move on to the next part of my life and ministry. As you move through this year, when you begin to gather together, as you grieve the loved ones who will be missing, as you celebrate the everyday wonders of being together in person; my prayer for you is that this next part of your story as Jubilee, as well as personally, unfolds and grows into something new and beautiful. Then, and now, I pray that you will hear Jesus' invitation to find a home in God's story and that you will know yourselves to be surrounded by Christ's love and light.

In the coming weeks, we will be finding a way to mark the end of our pastoral relationship through online worship. Please know that I am fully planning to come to church to visit in person as soon as it is allowed. Max and I will be forever grateful for the many ways you have welcomed Eleanor, Ru, and Caitie, who were all born during my time with you. Jubilee has been an especially significant church home for Eleanor in her early years (thank you, Jessica McKendry and Chanelle Christmas-LaFleur in the nursery!). I look forward to seeing Eleanor and Ru dance in the aisles when we visit and to introducing our newest baby to you.

And so, with much gratitude, I share my news with you, not saying goodbye just yet, but knowing it is coming soon.

Sincerely,



Rev. Anne Dionisio (she/her)
anne.dionisio@outlook.com



Mission & Service

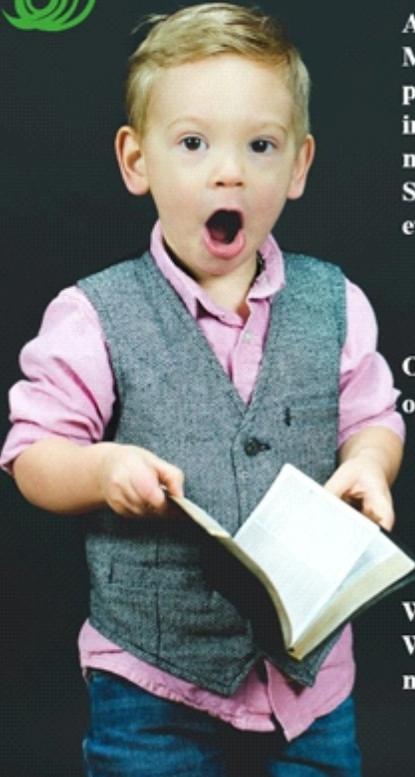
The members of Jubilee UC have been faithful and generous supporters of the national church's Mission and Service fund that offers financial assistance to a multitude of local, national, and international projects and programmes. In the April/May issue of *Broadview* magazine, the Reverend Jason Meyers, a recent intern here at Jubilee, is featured on a page highlighting the support given to 2,900 active and aspiring United Church ministers. You might like to go to the website: www.united-church.ca to search for "Jason's story" on video. Make a gift today to develop tomorrow's leaders!

Pam Lock

Brookbanks for African Grannies

Brookbanks for African Grannies is pleased to announce that we are collaborating with the Granny groups from all across Canada on a virtual concert called *Together In Concert: In Solidarity With African Grandmothers*. We are raising funds to support the Stephen Lewis Foundation's Grandmothers Campaign. As the Jubilee family knows, this campaign raises money to provide support to ensure that the African grandmothers and their community-based organizations in sub-Saharan Africa have the resources they need to continue their work as they are now responding to the intersecting pandemics of COVID-19, HIV, and AIDS. Our online concert featuring acclaimed Canadian performers on April 15 is free. Donations are welcome. Please see our website at www.cdngrandmothers.com for all the registration information.

Jeanne Kennedy



I Know Something You Don't Know!

A virtual social evening with Jubilee United Church. Members of the community share insight, knowledge and passion for a subject near to them that must might be of interest to you. We spend a little social time, enjoy a 30 minute presentation and then ask questions of our presenter. Some of us even have a cup of tea or other libation as the evening goes on.

The First Thursday of each Month at 730pm.

The Link is on the Jubilee Website

Our next gathering will actually be on the second Thursday of April – **April 8th at 730pm (just after Easter)**

Rai Remmel will help us understand the impact of World War 2 on Estonia (What happened in eastern Europe as a result of the struggle between Germany and Soviet Russia.)

We know a lot of about the effect of the war on Britain and Western Europe, but a large part of the picture has been missing from our movies and history books.



The Benevolent Fund

As you can imagine, 2020 was a year in which requests for support from the Benevolent Fund were at an all-time high. As people scrambled to hold things together, as others fell through the cracks or just got lost as all attention went to Covid 19, the need was great. Remarkably, so too was your support. Thank you.

Thank you on behalf of those who have found it a little easier to sleep because there was food in the cupboard, heat in the house, care for a child, virtual connection or masks for work. Thank you for providing signs of hope and compassion. The Benevolent Fund is a discretionary fund that I administer confidentially to those in need. Our support is not meant to be “ongoing” but occasional (when it comes to food security) or “one time only” when it comes to larger needs like paying a heating bill or getting books for school. We hope to help those whose needs are not recognized by the system and existing supports. Sadly, there is no lack. Even if we could not often meet in person to make a connection, we were still able to make a supportive connection by meeting an immediate need and assuring folks that we see them and care about their well-being.

You might be amazed at who needs help and the kind of help that is needed. You might be surprised to recognize the people discreetly seeking support and may also be surprised to know that several of the folks that we have helped in the past have come to be supporters of the Benevolent Fund in the present. Donations can be made in the usual ways: E-Transfers to admin@jubileeunited.ca, cheques can be mailed or dropped off, even *Canada Helps* can be used (canadahelps.org – search “Jubilee United Church”) – indicate on your cheque, in your email, or online donation that you would like the money to go to the Benevolent Fund. Sadly, I don't think that the need will go down very much in 2021, but I am encouraged that your support will not likely fade either.

I thank you for your on going support of the Benevolent Fund. *Norm*

If you haven't met her yet, allow us to introduce Jordana Wright.

Jordana has joined the Jubilee for at least the next six months on a part-time basis to help us develop our online and virtual ministry. The people and potential we have discovered through online services in the past year have indicated to us that there are great potential and ministry to be discovered by nurturing virtual ministry as an integral part of Jubilee United Church. We are going into uncharted territory, so we thought we would ask an experienced Community Builder with great online and social media skills to help us move forward. Fortunately, Jordana was looking for a community willing to take this kind of risk and follow where God is leading us.

Hello! My name is Jordana, and I'm the newest member of the Jubilee leadership team!

I'm so excited to be part of the Jubilee community. I've had such a great first few weeks getting to know congregants, getting involved with the life of the church, and working with others to vision about ways I can support and enhance our community. Everyone has been incredibly welcoming.

I would love to connect with you if I haven't already! I welcome all greetings and invitations to learn more about all things Jubilee at JubileeImpact@gmail.com. Talk soon!



Good Friday

Nobody wants to talk about it. It's painful. It doesn't make sense... Or maybe we just don't understand it. We don't like talking about things we don't understand. Last year we had a Virtual Good Friday service, and hundreds of people watched it. Many folks who had never been to a Good Friday service watched online. A couple of those people told me that they had never gone to a Good Friday service in person because they didn't want to be sad in front of everybody. Another said they didn't want to be embarrassed if they got up to leave because they didn't understand or didn't like it. But because it was on their computer or TV, they were willing to try it... and they were glad that they did. The cross is hard to understand sometimes. It's ugly and painful. It suggests a pretty nasty God that would let it all happen (or worse, MAKE it all happen) to an obedient, loving son.



What are we to understand as gaze at the cross?

Jesus died for our sins. That's what we are taught. It's what the Apostle Paul preached. So, who are we to disagree?

I'm not going to disagree... but I will point out that Paul had a lot of different ways of looking at the cross and understanding Jesus' death and resurrection. You need to appreciate that Paul was, in the earliest days of this "Jesus Movement," trying to make sense of the things that he had seen and heard... he didn't have any of our great hymns to guide him, so he came up with some different ways of understanding Jesus' death. Over time, however, one of his understandings took root and became what we call the dominant theology of the cross.

There is a green hill far away, outside a city wall,
where the dear Lord was crucified, who died to save us all.

We may not know, we cannot tell, what pains he had to bear;
but we believe it was for us he hung and suffered there.

There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin;
his death has opened wide the gate of heaven, to let us in.

O dearly, dearly has he loved, and we must love him too,
and trust in his redeeming blood, and try his works to do.

There Is a Green Hill Far Away, Cecil Frances Alexander, 1848

Why did that one come to dominate all the others? Well, perhaps because it is the correct one. Or perhaps because it made sense in our world. For millennia we have lived in a world that is most comfortable with action and consequence. We believe that we get what we pay for and that there is "no free lunch." We recognize that we're not the people that we could be – we fail at many things, sometimes unaware that we are about to fail. Other times, we go barreling headlong down a path that we know God would not endorse: a path that satisfies us at the expense of others and costs far more than the benefit could ever justify. So, being less than great people, how is it that we believe that God loves us? How is it that we can have any expectation of God's love, support, and presence? Well, something must have bought him off – balanced the scales – paid the price. A quick survey of the sins of the world and our most recent efforts at caring for each other or creation makes it pretty clear that we haven't paid the tab – so the idea of Jesus paying for our sins makes sense in our "Pay to Play" world.

Also, we see God as a great king. What kind of great king puts up with disobedience from his subjects and just forgives again and again? A king like that, in the real world, would be taken advantage of and soon conquered, thought of as a weak-minded fool and locked away. You can't just go around forgiving people – they'll walk all over you. Jesus as payment for our disobedience keeps God looking strong and smart.

So, it is with trepidation that I dare to imagine any other way of seeing the cross. I know that it makes God seem cruel to some and petty to others. But, remember when Jesus said that he came to fulfill the law and not destroy it? (Matthew 15, for those of you playing along at home). He seems to have been kind of a law and order guy... I don't want to destroy or break a law that's been working for a lot of people for 2,000 years.

When faced with such a dilemma, I have a tried and true practice: I avoid it.
I watch a movie... go for a walk... read a book... eat something... anything to put it out of my mind.

My second tried and true practice: Talk to Jesus.

I know that sounds strange... but it's what I do. I imagine sitting with Jesus, and I talk to him... I tell him my dilemma, and in my imagination, we converse. I want to assure you that I don't really think that Jesus in body and flesh is making a house call, but I do believe that, at the very least, unlocking my imagination is useful when it comes to looking for answers and new understandings. I do believe that it is a type of praying.

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So, I sat with Jesus in my kitchen. It wasn't really planned; I had just buttered a hot cross bun when he took a seat. I felt kind of awkward eating a hot cross bun in front of Jesus, so I just left it on the plate.

"That looks good," Jesus said.

"Really?" I asked, "Because I kind of thought that you wouldn't like hot cross buns very much, they must remind you of some terrible times."

"You think of the cross as terrible?" Jesus queried.

"Well, to be honest, I don't think that I understand it."

He smiled. "Paul didn't explain it well enough for you?"

"No, no... I mean, yes, yes... Paul did a great job... but ransom? You paid because we humans aren't good enough; not beloved enough for God without someone else paying the bill?"

"Wow, you have been thinking."

"It just seems so antiquated... and weird. What about all of those people who were born and died before you... or what about those who don't know you or believe in you... did you die for them, too, or do they have to join the club and be members in good standing before it counts?"

"And to think that you're teachers didn't think you'd amount to much... These are good questions, Norm... You do understand that time is a thing that you experience; for God, it's kind of like everything is now... and forever. So, born before the Bible stories or born after is no big deal... and you do understand that as much as you may love me, you can't define me or box me in – so you never know how I've been able to reach people... All sorts of ways that I might have influenced other lives..."

"So, you're saying that there ways to engage with you... with God... that I might not understand?"

"What do you say?"

"Oh no... I'm not playing that game. The last time someone played that game, it was Peter, and you gave him the responsibility for the whole church; I can barely handle my job."

"Okay... so what do you say about the cross? Don't worry; I promise that I'm easier than your ordination interview."

"Well... on the cross, I see the worst that the world can do to you. I see a point in time where betrayal, abuse, torture, and even death have all collided. All of the evil that humanity can do meets together on the cross... but it's not enough to make you, or God, give up. You forgive your tormentors, you love your betrayers... you do not turn your back on the world, even when the world has shown you its ugliest brutal face. In the end, love matters. All those other things fade away... but not you; not love."

"Ooooh, I like that.... Keep going"

"On the cross, I discover that death is not the end. Not the end of love, not the end of your ministry, not even the end of life. Personally, I do believe in your physical resurrection."

"Thank you."

"No, really... your resurrection is such a powerful statement about the lack of finality in death, a sense that no matter what the world does, love will triumph. It is so profound and metaphorical that it is tempting to believe it is simply and only that: a metaphor."

"It is a metaphor."

"You mean, it didn't happen?"

"No, I mean that it continues to happen... all the time. My resurrection should always point you beyond a single point in history to a broader truth that is evident in the universe..."

"So, it didn't happen?"

"Does it matter?"

"Yeah, it matters... I think. I mean... you're the law and order guy. The one who came, not to destroy or abolish the law, but to fulfill it... so, shouldn't we have some kind of rule of law; some kind of orthodox belief."

"You know, Norm... I wish that I could have that moment back."

"Which moment?"

"When I said that... fulfill the law, thing."

"Why? Didn't you mean it?"

"Sure, I meant it... it's just that I meant more. If I could say it again or get John to edit his text, I would have said, 'I haven't come to abolish the law, but rather to fulfill it overflowing...'

"What the heck does that mean?"

"It means that I want to fulfill the law... do the right things... answer the hopes of people, fulfill the theologies at work in the community... but I also want to over-fill them, so that they can spill over... break out of their vessels, engage the imagination and go beyond."

"So, you came to fulfill our theologies... answer our hopes... but to also invite us to go beyond... imagine more deeply... which means that..."

"...That it's okay to say that I died on the cross for you... it's also okay to say that something else happened on the cross, too... and something else... and something else... and just maybe you shouldn't have to wait for one day of the year to think about these things."

I thought about it in silence for a few minutes... Jesus waited.

I thought about God coming to me through the cross; I thought about the intersection of heaven and earth that is symbolized by the cross; I thought about a world that worships a culture of death and a God who refuses to participate... I thought about so many things that I realized Jesus had just taken all of my theology and fulfilled it to overflowing... actually, invited me to fulfill it to overflowing.

And then he got up to leave...

"You're leaving?" I asked.

"It's time," he explained.

"Will you be coming back?" I asked...

"What did Easter teach you?"

And then, he was gone.... And he'd taken my hot cross bun.



EASTER

I would like you to meet a woman. I can't say if she's 27 or 72, but I can say that she's had an "up and down" life. There have been some shining moments, but mostly she clings to the tough times... disappointments, emotional storms, betrayals, and failed relationships. They have come to define her.

But then she met someone.

Life changed when she met this man. This is not a Hallmark movie. There is no passionate love affair of which we can speak, although she loved him deeply. When she was with him, the darkness was gone; she felt whole... and over time, even when he was not around, she felt healed. No longer defined by the darkness in her life, light seemed to shine from her.



If you had asked her what he gave her, she probably would have had to search for an answer. In her groping response, she might have used the word "kingdom," or maybe the word "vision" or "dream." I don't know for sure. But she would look far-away and say quietly, "He gave me a vision of a new world, where I was different, people were different, and relationships were different, even, in a strange way, all of nature was different." And when someone would ask, "Different in what way?" she would grope again for words and say, "He seemed to be asking me to imagine what the world would be like if God's will was always and everywhere obeyed. He called it the Kingdom of God."

Imagine that world... A world without violence, without stealing, without racism, without cheating... A world where we could all be valued, and dignity and respect were assumed.

Very soon, she was spending nearly all of her time with this man. And she wasn't alone, others had found him, too, and they became a community of folk who had begun to share the same vision. So Mary – that was her name – left the village of Magdala by the lake and followed him and them. For a couple of years, things were very good, not perfect. There were unpleasant times – arguments, disagreements, sometimes even physical threats and danger. But he just moved through it all, led them through without worry or cost.

But then everything changed.

Gradually there were more enemies than friends. The danger became immediate and frightening. Afterwards, she would remember those weeks and days as if they had been a dream, a very different dream... a nightmare.

There came the day she would carry for the rest of her life. She was on a slope across from a small hill. On the hill were three of the obscene crosses the Romans used everywhere, and on one of them was the man she loved writhing and moaning like a wounded animal. His body was naked, his face drawn and white. He had lost all control because of the unbelievable pain. She stayed there until evening, until she saw his body taken down by friends, and she watched where he was laid to rest. She left the place, went to her lodging, and cried herself to sleep.

Then came the day that we call Easter. It is the first day of the week. It is not yet dawn. She has just reached the rock wall where she saw him placed. To her astonishment, the rock has an opening. The stone is rolled back. She backs away, terrified, then she runs.

She runs to where there are others who know her. She bursts in and hears herself shouting, "They've taken him. They've taken him." One of them holds her until they can make out what she means. As soon as they understand, they rush from the house, she with them.

John is younger. He gets there first, but he hesitates. Peter rushes past him, lowers his head, and disappears into the darkness. John goes after him. They stand in the shadows, thunder-stuck. They will remember this moment for the rest of their lives. What they see is the linen that had wrapped the body. It lies on the stone slab; the head linen folded a little distance from it. There is no body. Speechless, they come out. They walk as if in shock. They seem unaware that Mary is there.



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She waits in the silence, her sobbing the only sound. She stoops to look in. For her, instead of shadows, there is a blazing light. It seems focused where she has been expecting to tend his body. It is as if the light itself is questioning the necessity for her weeping. She steps back into the open air, hears a voice, and turns. The figure in the shadows could be anyone. Again she hears the same voice questioning her weeping. This time she pleads for pity. If his body is available, could she please be taken to it? Then she hears her name and her world blazes with the same light that she has seen in the tomb.

That evening she makes her way back into the city. This time there is no running, no shouting, no sobbing. The news is too great, too joyful. She looks at them, and they at her. She says quietly, **"I have seen the Lord,"** and her face and her voice are such that there are no questions.

**All this happened a long time ago.
To some, it's history.
To some, it seems like a dream.
To others, it is a vision.
To some of us, it is now.**

Now, because we continue to see this vision; dream this dream.

At the heart of the dream is the one who dreamed it, who died for it, and who in a way we will never understand, moved through death to call us to dream the dream and to build that kingdom of God in our own lives and in our own society and time.

If you could have asked Mary of Magdala what she believed, she would have said simply, "He is risen."

Everyone reading this has had a hard year. Some harder than others, but nobody has come through this time of pandemic unscathed. We've been separated, disappointed, frustrated, angered, betrayed... we have lost loved ones and friends... we have tried to make everything okay, and failed... We've been abused by some system or forgotten by another... Just like Mary. And the message to you: He is Risen. Dare to dream.

Everyone reading this... sometime in the last year, you've probably done something you shouldn't have. There is something... there always is. Something intentional, but you didn't think anyone would notice... some kind of oversight... you just weren't thinking. Or maybe you were thinking, but it was about yourself and not somebody else. It doesn't matter what you did – we all did something. And the message to you: He is Risen.

You are forgiven. I know that you find it hard to believe. The world is not a very forgiving place – cancel culture and family grudges remind us every day. Even worse is that we aren't very good at forgiving ourselves. But He is Risen. God forgives us for all that we have done... that's at least part of what the resurrection means. We are forgiven. We haven't destroyed the vision or the dream.

In the coming weeks and months, we will emerge from a pandemic, and each of us will be experiencing new life. We will be recovering what we need most from the past while continuing what we have learned and gained in the past year. We will together be creating a new way of being together. We needn't run back to the old ways. We will be invited to build something new that might more closely match the dream, the vision of equity and dignity, love and community that some would call the Kingdom of God. Some of us will do it in big ways, imagining and creating new practices and even institutions. Some of us will do it in small ways, engaging with each other with a new appreciation for companionship, for those who sustain our lives. But each and every one of us will be participating in our own experience of Easter.

In the days, weeks and months ahead, in the ups and the downs, please remember this: **He is Risen.** The Kingdom of God – a time and place where love is the first priority – is at hand.

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