

**BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI**  
**THE WORSHIP OF GOD • APRIL 12, 2020**  
**EASTER SUNDAY**

**The Litany**  
**Based on Psalm 118**

*There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous.*

**Christ is risen!**

*We shall not die, but live, and recount the deeds of the Lord.*

**Christ is risen!**

*The stone the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.*

**Christ is risen!**

*This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!*

**Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed!**

**Song of Focus**  
***Begin Again***  
**based on John 20:1-18**  
**Words and Music by Ed Varnum**

1. "Our Lord is not there," Mary Magdalene cried out.  
So, they ran to the tomb, wondering, "What's this all about?"  
And they found the tomb was empty! Someone rolled away the stone!  
And on that first Easter morning, the disciples headed home.  
Then the Lord appeared unto them risen from the dead! Amen!  
And their lives were changed forever, and they began again.
2. Here we are Easter Sunday, and we've heard that it is real.  
It affects our every moment, so much more than what we feel!  
If he rose and he is living, if it all is really true,  
then the Lord is there in all things: at work, play, home with you.  
If you know that he is living, risen from the dead! Amen!  
Then, live each day for Jesus. You can begin again.

**The Scripture**  
**John 20:1-18**

*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. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid*

him.” Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But 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.

**The Message**  
**All Groan Up: Begin Again**  
**Mark Briley**

**Synopsis:** *“Then the disciples returned to their homes.”* (John 20:10)

The celebration following a big “win” of any kind can only last so long. At some point, everyone returns to their homes. Some bask in the victory a bit longer. Some wonder, “*What now?*” Some immediately begin training for the next season. When Peter and John saw that the tomb was empty, the gospel writer simply says, *“Then the disciples went home.”* As a fellow participant in the resurrection of Christ, what are you going to do? How will you begin again?



*“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whosoever believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.”* Many of you have heard those words before. Maybe in a worship service. Maybe on a bumper sticker. Maybe on Tim Tebow’s eye black tape, or by a guy dressed as a clown, holding a sign at some sporting event. Ah... Remember sporting events?

This *John 3:16* word gets around. The first four words may be all we really need to know... maybe all we really need to hear today: *“For God so loved...”* For God so loved!

Have you ever so loved anything? Not just regular old love which is pretty marvelous itself. I mean, I love the Kansas City Chiefs. I love that new drumstick concrete of frozen custard heaven at Andy’s. I love that feeling of your favorite song coming on the radio, and you sing along with all you’ve got. You just roll down that window and bust a vocal chord without a care in the world. I love that. But have you ever so loved something? That’s a deeper kind of love.

That’s the kind of love that the Apostle Paul says, *“never”* ends. *For God so loved the world...* for God so loved *you...* that we’re plugging in from home today, maybe even risked dressing in our uncomfortable pastel clothes to shout at a screen from home, *“He is risen indeed!”* All because God so loved.

Mary Magdalene wasn’t feeling the love that first Easter morning. While it was still dark, she heads out to the tomb where Jesus’ body lay. She’s got her earbuds in as she heads that way. I imagine some Amos Lee – *“When you’re gone, colors seem to fade,”* or maybe Jason Isbell’s tune, *“Hope for the High Road”* -- *“I know you’re tired and you ain’t sleeping well. Uninspired and likely mad as hell. But wherever you are I hope the high road leads you home again; to a world you want to live in.”*

She can hope but why bother? She’s sleep deprived and grieving and really just going through the motions. Tell me you haven’t ever felt that way. Friend from church posted a word this week that said, *“Discovery during isolation: turns out my top three hobbies are: 1. Eating at restaurants. 2. Going to nonessential businesses. And 3. Touching my face.* These were lighthearted, but there’s that underlining painful truth, too. You’re doing all you can do just to get by – your partner has flaked out on you. Your boss is

projecting her stress onto your job performance. You're caring for a loved one, who can't always remember your name.

Mary's world is rocked. Her tear ducts have no reservoir left from which to form new tears. *And* she just got a text from her neighbor – her dog is running loose in the neighborhood again. It was like the meme I saw this week that said, "*I am presently experiencing life at a rate of several 'What the hecks!'*" per hour." And I promise you that's a paraphrase. It's a crass reality sometimes, but I'm guessing you've felt like Mary feels.

She gets to the tomb with her essential oils to care for the body of her Lord only to discover things are out of place. She didn't get too close. She didn't examine inside. She just noticed the stone had been pushed away, and that set her off. She ran back to the place Peter and the 'other' disciple, presumably John, were hanging out. It's interesting that she goes to Peter directly. It was just a few days ago that Peter's denial was front and center news. Jesus had been arrested, and Peter was caught out in public three times saying, "*Jesus? Never met the guy.*" The denial was back-stabbing enough. What made it worse was the way he went on and on ahead of time, telling Jesus, "*Those other punks may run out on you but not me. I'm in it to win it. I won't bail on you. I'll die for you if I have to.*"

Well... Some of us talk a big game, don't we? Some of us quite proudly so! We can point at the other Christians, who we feel don't have it all together like we do and say, "*I ain't like them. They believe the wrong things. My favorite talk radio host thinks so, too.*" Before you know it, the betrayal is our own. But here's Mary going straight to Peter with the news that something's up at the tomb. Peter, in all his faults and failures – not unlike our own – is still looked to as a leader. No matter what we've done or who we've become, there is always a spot in the ongoing effort of Christ. For God so loved... remember? What is God's love if not redemptive?

So, the foot race ensues. Peter and John racing to the tomb. It is hilariously always noted that for a couple of thousand years, it has been preserved who won that race to the tomb. John, the writer of the Gospel, taking liberties here perhaps to make sure everyone knows he's faster. Some say, Peter must have been much older than John, due to the time when John's work is written. Age has slowed him. Peter's version, if told, surely noted that he had plantar fasciitis or something that slowed him down. Whatever the case, John gets at PR on this race to the tomb, beating Peter there, but he doesn't go in. Is that a personality thing or another sign of the strength of Peter's leadership? Did John default to Peter's role waiting for him to arrive before going in? It's doesn't really matter. When Peter gets there, he busts right in as we expect him to. He's a bold, brash sort of guy. He never read the instructions when assembling the bunk beds for his kids and he never stops to ask for directions when he's lost. He looks at the evidence – some linens spread around, no sign of the body of Jesus and he

scratches his head. His blood pressure rises. John peers in, sees the same thing and believes that Jesus has risen on his own like he said he would. Now, this could be his privileged revisionist history as the Gospel writer. *“Of course, I believed right away!”*

By the time Mary gets back to the tomb, the guys have already headed back home. She’s exhausted, frustrated and can do nothing but stare at that death tomb and grieve.

*We are Peter and John and Mary, aren’t we? Peter’s confused. John believes. Mary is grieving. We all look away from this screen for a minute pondering this account, gazing out the window as the neighbor is walking the dog and come at this story from a different angle... based on our life experience, our history, our past.*

For some of us, our past is a great deterrent from living into a life of resurrection ourselves. Someone once said, *“We too readily make our past the CEO of our lives.”* We stay stuck in our old ways, our old thoughts, our moments of mistake or failure or poor judgment and say, *“Nah... I’m staying back here in this mess because there’s really nothing for me in the future.”* It’s a defeatist spirit – not a resurrection spirit. Rob Bell said, *“When we don’t throw ourselves completely into [the now] and we hold back our best efforts because of what happened in the past, we are letting the past decide the future.”*<sup>1</sup> When we feel this way, we quit showing up to our lives.

A colleague of mine was keynoting a youth camp a couple of summer’s ago, and he set up his talks on that first night intro by saying, *“Most of the time, the most courageous thing you can do in your life is just show up.”* You know what goes through a kid’s mind and spirit when they tear up in the morning and say, *“Please don’t make me go to school today?”* Hard to know. Those kids that walk through those school doors everyday are courageous. Maybe that’s you showing up for work. Maybe for some it’s even showing up at the dinner table with your family... especially during quarantine. It takes courage to show up and pay attention to your life. On the last night of this camp, the leader invited everyone to take a slip of paper and pencil, return to their seats, and write down a prayer request – not for their dog or their sister or their great aunt’s bunion – but something personal; something they wanted God’s spirit to do within them. My preacher friend wrote on his paper: *“I’d like to have the courage to live the way I preach.”* I feel you, brother. The leader then invited them to bring their paper forward and put it in a basket with all the others. At the close of the service, when they left, they were to reach into the basket and pull out one of the requests. My friend pulled one out... best he could tell, it was the writing of a young person – a Freshman perhaps – 14, 15 years old – it said, *“I’m so afraid, God. Help me.”* Heart

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<sup>1</sup> A quote from Rob Bell’s book, *“How to Be Here.”* <https://robbell.com/portfolio/howtobehere/>.

wrenching words. Those could have been Mary's words that morning: *"I'm so afraid, God. Help me."*<sup>2</sup>

But the plot was about to thicken. Mary's earbuds now welcomed another song. It's Taylor Swift this time. *Begin Again* is the song. Do you know it? *"Thinking all love ever does is break and burn and end... but on a Wednesday in a café, I watched it begin again."*

Mary's not thinking *"For God so loved..."* she's thinking *"What good is love?"* All love ever does is break and burn and end. But on a Sunday, at an empty tomb, she watched love begin again. There's a man there now. She thinks he's the gardener. It didn't cross her mind to think that the gardener probably had the day off – it was Easter and all and Chic-fil-a wasn't even open. A confusing and stammering conversation about *"If you saw where they took him"* and *"if you could just point me in the right direction"* turns into a *"For God so loved"* reunion. When Jesus calls Mary by name, she unmistakably recognizes the voice of her Lord. It wasn't the first word he spoke to her. She didn't recognize him until he said her name.

There's something personal in this moment that may be worth us considering. You can read the Bible cover to cover. You can listen to the best preaching the world has to offer – the interwebs open you to more worship services today than ever before. People are worship-hopping more than ever in this quarantine, because everyone's online. You can debate your friends and family about doctrine and right belief and which denomination Jesus prefers, but until you've made it personal – you'll not recognize the voice of Christ; you'll not recognize the world that God so loves as anything other than allies and enemies, dirt and water. Until it's personal, love won't challenge you to grow your circle of welcome. Easter becomes personal to Mary the instant she hears her name; and she is astonished.

The church may be missing the boat on this. Mike Yaconelli is in the resurrection now, but when he walked this earth, he was an influential author and youth pastor. A few years back, he spoke about the greatest issue facing the church – not addiction or technology or doctrine. He said, *"The greatest issue facing the church today is dullness. We have lost our astonishment. The 'Good News' is no longer good news, it's okay news. Christianity is no longer life changing, it is life enhancing. Jesus doesn't change people into wide-eyed radicals anymore, he changes them into nice people."* There's nothing wrong having your life enhanced or becoming a nicer person – those are good things – but there's got to be something greater, don't you think? Something more personal at stake. Mike says, *"It is time to find the place where the dangerous wonder of faith can be discovered again..."*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A story shared by Rev. Dr. Glen Miles on a couple of different occasions. Dr. Miles is Senior Pastor of First Community Church in Columbus, Ohio. <http://fcchurch.com/>.

<sup>3</sup> From Yaconelli's work, "Dangerous Wonder". Tyndale House. 1998.

That's having faith on purpose... a personal faith that doesn't shut down when we get to the end of YouTube Easter. We don't get up from the couch today thinking, "Nice service," but thinking, "How can I begin again?" 'For God so loved' becomes a challenge for us to so love one another, too; so, love the world that we might hold the wonder of it all again. That we might be astonished at what love invites us to do, and then we make it personal. That sooooo kind of love changes the way we operate in our own homes, in our workplaces, in our neighborhoods and even in our churches. And it's that kind of Easter love that can change the world still.

My wife spells people's names in big letters almost every day... puts it right there in their front yards. They are encouraging messages: "Happy Birthday, Linda!" "Welcome home, Barney!" "Anne is our Hero!" Big letters... plain as can be. It's such a joyous thing. This last week, a beloved friend from our congregation wanted to send a BIG birthday message to his mom that lives in a care facility. He can't get inside the building to see her in these pandemic days, so he sent as big a message as he possibly could out on the lawn: "Happy 95<sup>th</sup> Birthday, Marian!" Right there. Big letters. And as Carrie is putting up the sign, there from the third-floor window, Marian beams down and blows kisses and grins from ear to ear. That's *her* name! That's for *her*. That is the soooo love of her children.

Maybe you just need to see your name in the Easter story... it's there in big letters, but perhaps you just haven't made it out just yet. I wish I could say, "Pause this message right now and go outside and look..." and with the biggest letters I could find, the message would say, "For God soooo loved you..." And there would be your name, and you could see it so clearly. While I fail the time and space and number of letters to pull that off, that's the message God has for you and me today. Easter has your name written all over it. Easter couldn't be contained in any tomb, and it can't be contained in any church sanctuary.

In fact, every sanctuary in the world is empty today... and isn't that the *shake-your-head* truth about the whole thing anyway? Just as verse ten in the twentieth chapter of John says, "Then the disciples returned to their homes," such is the same for us today. Easter goes home. And it must if it's going to make any real difference in your life. Easter only truly flies on when it's let loose in the world – into a world that desperately needs some resurrection right now. We don't anoint our past or give its grip control, we step forward to the future knowing that God so loved even you, even me, that we might trust in Christ and know life that is truly life. Love doesn't break or burn or end. Love *never* ends. On Easter morning, we watch it begin again.

Now? It's on us -- what will we do with Easter? What will you do because God so loved *you*? I don't know about you, but I'm so done with death. Three days of death was enough for Jesus, too. He was so done with death. We often say, "Life's too short" as a

way of saying, "*Make the best of your time.*" The flipside is true today. "*Death's too short*" to let it rule your thoughts, your fears, your relationships, and your faith. It's time to live unafraid. Christ the Lord is risen today! And Easter has your name written all over it! Let's begin again...