

Coram Deo  
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura  
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi

Deo Volente  
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church

by The Rev. Dr. John S. Niles

Easter Sunday

# What Easter Gives Back

**John 20:1-20**

**April 17, 2022**

During their vacation and while they were visiting Jerusalem, George's mother-in-law died. With death certificates in hand, George went to the American Consulate Office to make arrangements to send the body back to the States for proper burial.

The Consul, after hearing of the death of the mother-in-law told George that the sending of a body back to the States for burial is very, very expensive. It could cost as much as \$10,000.00. The Consul continues, in most cases the person responsible for the remains normally decides to bury the body here. This would only cost a few hundred dollars plus the cost of the grave. George thought for some time and answers, "I don't care how much it will cost to send the body back; that's what I want to do." The Consul, after hearing this, says, "You must have loved your mother-in-law very much considering the difference in price." "No, it's not that," says George. "You see, I know of a case years ago of a person that was buried here in Jerusalem. On the third day he arose from the dead! I just can't take that chance, with her."

No one loved Jesus more than Mary. He knew her like no one else, and lifted her up while others only wanted to put her down. And so, after the crucifixion it is not surprising that it was Mary that went to prepare him for burial. And it was shocking for her to find him missing. "They have taken away my Lord" Mary said, yet, numbed and half blinded by grief she caught sight of him but mistook him for the gardener. And then Jesus said, "Mary".

What is in a name? "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell just as sweet." William Shakespeare uses this line in his play Romeo and Juliet to convey that the naming of things is irrelevant. I disagree.

Why are names important? Why is it so important to use people's names? According to Dale Carnegie, "a person's name is to *that* person the sweetest and most important sound in any language. The sound of your name being used typically cuts through all other noise that might be going on around you. Since birth, you have been conditioned to respond to the sound of your name."

A name is what gives us our identity. Our world is built around names. The words we attach to different things in order to give meaning to ourselves and our world. Names are filled with meaning, all I have to do is say a few, "Cher, Sting, Einstein, Mother Teresa, Maya Angelou, Churchill. A world is conjured up in our minds eye, when we hear them.

So when Jesus said in that garden, "Mary", everything she lost was given back to her. Easter gives back to us everything that Good Friday takes from us.

Easter because of Jesus gives us back **hope**. The disciples had lost all hope. They had pinned all their hopes on Jesus and now they thought He was gone, and with Him their dreams. Dreams can so easily be dashed. Can't they?

On Feb. 27, 1991, at the height of Desert Storm, that Ruth Dillow received a very sad message from the Pentagon. It stated that her son, Clayton Carpenter, Private 1st Class, had stepped on a mine in Kuwait and was dead.

Ruth Dillow later wrote, "I can't begin to describe my grief and shock. It was almost more than I could bear. For 3 days I wept. For 3 days I expressed anger & loss. For 3 days people tried to comfort me, to no avail because the loss was too great."

But 3 days after she received that message, the telephone rang. The voice on the other end said, "Mom, it's me. I'm alive." Ruth Dillow said, "I couldn't believe it at first. But then I recognized his voice, and he really was alive." The message was all a mistake!

She said, "I laughed, I cried, I felt like turning cartwheels, because my son whom I had thought was dead, was really alive. I'm sure none of you can even begin to understand how I felt."

Perhaps not, but some who walked the pages of the New Testament would have understood how she felt because they experienced the same emotions themselves. And in the face of His death everything changed, and in the light of His Resurrection life would be forever different.

W. B. Yeats understood this when he wrote:

Had I the heaven's embroidered cloths  
Enwrought with golden and silver light,  
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths  
Of night and light and half light,  
I would spread the cloths under your feet  
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet;  
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

We all have hopes and dreams--dreams for ourselves and our work, dreams for our love ones. We have dreams about the future. And when things go wrong; when our dreams are crushed under foot, we find ourselves losing hope. When our work goes wrong and we leave without having been able to accomplish what we had dreamed; or when we lose our job. Or when the people we had believed in betrayed us. Or when the person who we loved dies; we wonder if we will ever be able to pierce the hopeless gloom that comes over our soul.

Dylan Thomas wrote a poem called "And Death shall Have No Dominion." In it, he declares that death shall have no dominion because, "while lovers be lost love shall not." It sounds not only defiant, but triumphant. Then we remember that if those we love be lost, death has dominion enough. Caitlin, the wife of Dylan Thomas understood this when Dylan died. She wrote a book and called it "Leftover Life to Kill". She felt hopeless.

I was asked to conduct a funeral a few years back. I arrived early to meet with the family and met the Priest who had just finished conducting the previous funeral as he was leaving. As I

entered the office of the funeral home, I was greeted with a lady screaming and crying, saying, "He is alive, he is alive!" She began to run frantically in circles screaming, "He is alive. I just talked to him."

The funeral directors explained to me, as the noise in the chapel began to grow in strength and become louder and louder that the man in the coffin that they just had a full funeral service for was not related to the family. And that, even though the man looked something like the man in the picture the man who they thought was dead was actually in the living room of his sister having tea.

They didn't know what to do. Everyone was screaming at them every time they stepped out of the office. So I walked in the middle of the crowd and said. "Shut Uppppp! Why are you crying and yelling at the Funeral Director? This man you thought was dead is alive! Go celebrate and give thanks and live and love like you have never done before for you have faced death and overcome it...and make sure to go to church on Sunday and give thanks." Some started laughing and clapping. Then I said, "Now, get out of here and stop bugging me. I have a service to perform."

Jesus just said, "Mary".

That was it. The dawn broke through. The Son had risen. And with Him the darkness of Mary's life was gone. Everything the Friday before had taken away, was given back that day. The Friday before had taken away their hopes and dreams, their lives and their Lord. That morning gave back all that and more.

We come today to remember and rejoice. We do so not just because it happened so many years ago, but because it happens even today.

I don't know what you are going through; maybe you have been just diagnosis is cancer, or you are grieving the loss of a loved one, or you lost your job, or just separated from your husband or wife, or perhaps you are simply discouraged with life itself. Let me promise you this, that there is hope because of Him.

## II

Easter gives us back hope, and also Easter gives us back **ourselves**. *He said, "peace be with you"* When Jesus was crucified the pieces of the people's lives--that had been for the first time in place--fell apart in their hands. They felt the brokenness as never before. Fear overwhelmed their faith, despair chased them. The emptiness that was there before His coming returned with greater intensity, for now they knew what they were missing; until that first Easter morning, for it was then that He gave them back themselves.

Now, if you don't think this is true, think of those who love you--whether that is a friend or family member, or one whom you have loved. Think of how you have been elevated by their belief in you. When others said, "you would fail." They said, "I have faith in you." When others rejected you; they received you. You were able to see yourself as a result through their eyes. When others gossip and say, "I don't know what he sees in her". He would say, "I do!" He sees what no one else sees. who she really is.

Now, that is what Jesus does on a vast scale. He believes in you; until you believe in yourselves, He loves you into loving and He gives us back ourselves.

A few years ago, a little guy was brought to us having been abandoned. We were told he name, and we thought it was delightful because it sounded like "more food and pie ah" Mofupieah. At least I thought is sounded like More Food and Pie ah. We also thought it was

delightful, because the name was given by his grandfather before he was handed over to CAS. However, once we found out its meaning and the reason for it being given we refused to use it; as Mofupieah meant –“scorned and unwanted”. And he was named that by his grandfather because he was scorned and unwanted by her family.

Yet, when he arrived in our home he was no longer scorned or unwanted, but loved, and adored and went on to be adopted a couple and given a new name that expressed all the love, acceptance and belonging he deserved.

Look at what the Word of God said happened to the disciples. They were no longer broken and beaten. They were no longer the shell of what they once were. They were filled because the tomb was empty. Whenever we look at the impact that Christ had on people’s lives we see this. We look at Simon the man of sand, who becomes Peter the Rock. Or Saul the great, who becomes Paul the small--small in himself but might for God. Or James and John no longer fisherman, but sons of Thunder,

### III

Easter gives back hope and ourselves and also **eternal life** <sup>9</sup> *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”* <sup>20</sup> *After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.*

Eternal life is not something that is out there somewhere. It is something that starts here and now and goes on into eternity.

When my children were young, I would often be asked what is heaven like not only by children but by adults. And I would respond by saying, think of everything that you like, enjoy and love - it is just a taste of what heaven is like. Earth is like going into Basken Robbins ice cream and they give you those tiny tiny spoons and you get to taste a bit of butterscotch ripple, or tiger claw, or Neapolitan, or double chocolate fudge ice cream on those little spoons. Just a taste and you then imagine what a whole cone or tub of it would like. That’s heaven! And our time on earth is just a taste.

To which one of my children said, “but not everyone tastes heaven on earth. Some only get to taste a bit of hell.” I said, “you are right, and that is why Jesus came that we can choose to have life and that abundantly now on earth and in heaven. And not just taste hell.”

As the psalmist said, *"Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how transient I am. Indeed, You have made my days are as a handbreadth....Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You" (Ps. 39:4-7).*

Rufus Jones, a Quaker Theologian and philosopher, years ago traveled to England to preach and give lectures. While there his son died in the USA. There were no planes then that could thrust him back to the US in a few hours. So, Rufus Jones, could not get home for the funeral of his son. On the day of the funeral his friends in England marvelled at his grace and serenity and told him so. He replied that the secret of his calm was very simple. All their life his son and he had loved and been loved by Jesus. And “so where there was so much love there must be more”

That’s it. You think about that. Amen