

Understanding Resurrection: The Good News of God Reading: Matthew 28:1-10 Easter/A
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We are a people who are formed by the media, including but not limited to social media, TV, radio, newspapers, and magazines. Because the goal of most media outlets is to make money, the spin that they put on news is meant to cause fear and anxiety. For some strange reason, we human beings are more apt to listen to news that causes our adrenalin to increase, similar to getting a thrill on a rollercoaster. I don't know why we are addicted to adrenalin rushes, but this heightened sense of awareness causes us stress and confers a negative perspective on both the present and the future. We are so used to hearing bad news that we often miss out on the good news that is before our eyes.

Did you know that last year, so many good and wonderful and amazing things happened in the world? Can you name them for me? Probably not as the media drew our attention to all that was corrupt, evil, death enhancing, cynical, and discouraging. No wonder we are so afraid, hardened by the challenges of life, and unable to see the sunshine breaking through the clouds. For instance, in 2016:

1. More than 20 countries pledged more than \$5.3 billion for ocean conservation and created 40 new marine sanctuaries covering an area of 3.4 million square km. (*Reuters*)
2. New research showed that acid pollution in the atmosphere is now almost back to the level that it was before it started with industrialization in the 1930s. (*Science Bulletin*)
3. The World Health Organization released a report showing that, since the year 2000, global malaria deaths have declined by 60%. (*WHO*)
4. Life expectancy in Africa has increased by 9.4 years since 2000, thanks to improvements in child survival, progress in malaria control, and expanded access to ARVs (drugs for HIV/AIDs). (*Quartz*)
5. Liberia was officially cleared of Ebola, meaning there are now no known cases of the deadly tropical virus left in West Africa. (*Vanguard*)
6. In 1990, more than 60% of people in East Asia lived in extreme poverty. As of 2016, that proportion has dropped to 3.5%. (*Vox*)
7. Homelessness in the United States declined by 35% since 2007.
8. The Chinese government placed a ban on new coal mines, created new rules for grid access, and doubled its renewables targets for 2020. (*WRI*)
9. Following the end of conflict in Colombia in 2016, all of the war in the world is now limited to an arc that contains less than a sixth of the world's population. (*Associated Press*)
10. Good science and simple economics have started a reversal in overfishing in the United States. (*New York Times*)
11. In June, a new survey showed that the ozone hole has shrunk by more than 3.9 million square kilometers since 2006. Scientists now think it will now be fully healed by 2050. (*Sydney Morning Herald*)
12. In July, more than 800,000 volunteers in India planted 50 million trees in one day. The country is planning on reforesting 12% of its land. (*National Geographic*)
13. Later that month, Israel revealed that it now makes 55% of its freshwater. That means that one of the driest countries on Earth now has more water than it needs. (*Ensisia*)
14. McDonalds announced it would be removing corn syrup from its hamburger buns and removed antibiotics from its chicken months ahead of schedule. (*CNBC*)
15. By August, every major grocery and fast-food chain in the US had pledged to use only cage-free eggs by 2025. (*Washington Post*)
16. Germany took in an additional 300,000 refugees in 2016, despite growing concerns about integration and a backlash from populists. (*Guardian*)

Surprising, isn't it! Miracles abound especially when compassion triumphs. I wonder why the media doesn't spend more time on these incredible achievements that are being made all over the world. Maybe if it did, we would be a lot more joyful and a lot less fearful. Maybe if we celebrated these amazing acts of goodness, we would become people of resurrection rather than remain stoic cynics.

I do not underestimate the challenges in our world today nor the challenges that we face on a personal level. But I do know that it is easy to become so habituated with bad news that when the sun actually shines, we miss out on the rays. We often become so discouraged, that we remain hopeless, unable to believe that the future can hold possibilities that are not evident in the present. This sense of discouragement and hopelessness pretty much sums up the context of today's gospel story when two women make their way to the tomb where Jesus had been buried two days earlier.

It had been a very bad week for all them and they were frightened for what the future held. After Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the tables turned for the worse: Arrested, put on trial, beaten, scorned, crucified, and buried in a tomb. It couldn't get much bleaker than that. Darkness descended upon them and the disciples were nowhere to be found. That is, except for the women who went to the tomb to prepare the body with spices. Having little hope, no expectations, and no vision for the future, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were shocked at what they found at the burial site: An empty tomb with no visible body, the stone rolled back, and a messenger as white as snow.

In Matthew's story of the resurrection, the angel's first words to the women at the tomb were: "Don't *you* be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus the crucified one. He is not here, for he was raised just as he said." The angel is commanding the women to reject their current state of fear, and to digest good news, news that seems rather improbable if not impossible to absorb. God is clearly doing something new, something that could never have been imagined in the past.

In all of the Easter stories, there is no description of the actual resurrection. Not even the gospels can describe this phenomenon. No amount of explanation can adequately explain the meaning and significance of Easter. What we do know however is that tomb is empty, the stone has been rolled away, and the closest disciples begin to witness brief encounters of the risen Christ.

And while there is no description of the resurrection, the gospels conclude that the powers of the world that corrupt and destroy the creatures of God couldn't keep Jesus dead. Out of the ashes of destruction, new life appears. The stone that once sealed the entrance to the tomb has been rolled away. What has happened in the past, no matter how painful and final it seemed, death is not the final word. We Christians call this good news, *resurrection*: the belief that darkness and death do not determine the future and the Light of Christ will triumph in the end.

So, don't you be afraid! Don't let the bad news in the world today dash your dreams for a different future. Don't let fear cloud your eyes from noticing the good news. Resurrection gives us courage to face whatever chaos or trauma life throws at us because the future contains potentialities that are not visible in the present moment. The story of Easter is good news, amazing news that has only just begun. While some clouds remain in our skies today, the Son continues to shine through, sustaining our hope that with God, all things are possible. So become a person of the resurrection. Open your arms in joy and praise. Live in faith and hope. Let the Son shine in. Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed, alleluia.