

One of our UM Easter hymns begins with the words: **“I serve a risen Savior, he’s in the world today; I know that he is living, whatever foes may say.”** Alfred Ackley, who wrote this hymn in 1933, knew exactly who he was, for in this hymn he identifies himself as a servant of his resurrected Savior. Edmond Budry who wrote another Easter hymn declares: **“Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son...”** Here Edmond gives honor to the resurrected Son of God. And William M. James who wrote the words for today’s closing hymn, not only identifies us as Easter people, and gives us a mandate to praise God, but he also brings forward the Easter event into our own lives, right now. --For he declares that: **“Every day to us is Easter, with its resurrection song.”**

In the last few days I can remember personally identifying myself to people in different situations: At one of our care facilities, at our ecumenical Good Friday service, and over the phone. What if, rather than describing myself as the pastor of Wesley Church, I would have said: “I’m Ruth Egerer and my identity comes from my Lord, Jesus Christ, who lived, died and rose again, and in whose life and power I live my life every day”? This would be an even more accurate description of who I am, and of who each of us is, for it takes into account a reality that goes beyond the here and now, because as **“People of the Resurrection”** we have an eternal relationship with Jesus, our Savior and Lord—who also empowers our present life here and now...every day.

1. As we look at the account of the Jesus’ Resurrection this morning, as recorded in Matthew’s Gospel, we are told that it began early on the first day of the week. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary go to the tomb where Jesus’ body had been placed. They had heard the words of Jesus, seen his miracles, and experienced his compassion. They had been there at the cross and when he was laid in the tomb. Yet somehow they hadn’t comprehended Jesus’ prediction that he would be raised on the third day, for they are coming to embalm *a dead body*. Were they so overwhelmed with grief over Jesus’ death that they just could not remember any of Jesus’ words?

Several Roman guards had been posted at the tomb to make sure that no one would try to steal the body of Jesus and then claim that he had risen from the dead. As the women approach the tomb, there’s an earthquake—an affirmation from nature, and an angel of the Lord—a divine affirmation, who appears and rolls away the stone. This whole event leaves the otherwise tough and unemotional Roman guards, scared to death.

The angel then addresses the women: **“Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.”** *“Remember the promise that Jesus made to you?” the angel is saying.* *“He’s done what he said he would do. See for yourselves.”* So the women not only hear the truth, but see the truth.

2. But the glorious message of Jesus’ resurrection is not just for them. It is for all people. So the angel urges them: **“Go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Look, I have told you.”** Go tell it on the mountain, on the hills and everywhere that Jesus has risen to life again. He is still your Lord and Master. He will still be going before you to show you the way. Go and tell the disciples, for their hearts are aching for any shred of hope.

3. And what do the women do? Awe-struck and filled with wonder and great joy, they run to tell the disciples the news. They know for sure now that the Lord’s word is true. They saw the angel roll away the stone of an empty tomb. They know that Jesus is

not dead. There is no need for sorrow. Joy is the final word, and joy wants to be shared. And so they run to share the good news that Jesus is risen, and is going on to Galilee where the disciples will see him when they get there.

And here is an extra gift--Jesus appears to the women while they are on their way *to find the disciples*. Why did he do that? The women already knew the truth of Jesus' Resurrection and believed it. They were already filled with joy over this news and were on their way to share it. Why does Jesus appear to them? Perhaps the point is to remind them and us that the risen Jesus is always with us to encourage us as we faithfully carry out what he's calling us to do.

And so...what can we take with us this Easter morning and treasure in our hearts in the days to come? First, we can have confidence in God. Raising Jesus from the dead was indeed miraculous, yet even more, it was God keeping his word. Death was not the last word, *just as Jesus said*. Easter reminds us that we can believe that our God is faithful, and that his promises come to pass. And God's promises are these: that by faith we are enabled to receive his grace and be saved, and that he will always be with us, and that he will bring ultimate good out of everything in our life for the sake of his kingdom *on earth*; and that he will bring us at last to himself in the *heavenly* kingdom when the time is right.

Secondly, the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection is news that we are called to share. Go and tell. When we've been to a great concert, read a good book, enjoyed a fabulous meal, or celebrated a special event with our family, we can't wait to tell someone about it. In the same way we have received the amazingly wonderful gift of God's unconditional love. What will we do with that gift? Will we dedicate ourselves to bringing other people into a relationship with God in whatever way we can? The women at the tomb wasted no time to spread the news of God's great love. They made it their top priority. Can we do any differently?

Finally, when we welcome the Risen Jesus into our hearts, we will know joy. When we claim his word as truth we will know joy. When we are faithful to God's call to share the good news we will know joy. With Jesus in our hearts we know that nothing can separate us from God's love, not now, not ever.

This Easter Sunday: May our belief in the Risen Lord be strengthened, and our faith in the promises of God be confirmed. May we share with others the good news of Jesus Christ and all it means, in all the ways we can. And may we claim with joy our identity as **People of the Resurrection** every day of our lives. Amen.