

For two and a half weeks, I've had a picture of a tweet on my phone, saving it, precisely for this morning, and I've gone back to it time and time and time again, rereading, preparing myself for how, *weird* and different and strange this morning was going to feel, because every time I started feeling that little creep of worry about it, I would go back to it and remind myself of what it said, which is: "The first Easter didn't happen at a church. It happened outside of an empty tomb, while all the disciples were sequestered in a home, grief-stricken and wondering what was going on. So, we're all going to be keeping things pretty Biblical this Easter." So, y'all, welcome to the Bible: 2020 pandemic edition, which comes with the not so subtle reminder that we are not the first ones to be in this position, even if it's under mildly different circumstances.

Think about it...no one involved in the story of the resurrection were expecting it to happen. No one woke up on that first Easter morning and thought, hey, today is the day the world is going to change, today is the day my whole life is going to get turned upside down. No one anticipated it being anything different from what they had already been living. Think about the disciples...waking up that first Easter morning. For them, it probably felt a little bit how we all feel, waking up like it's Groundhog's Day. What are we going to do today, Peter? The same thing we do

everyday, Thomas...hide, grieve, figure out what in the world we're going to do next. Because ever since the moment of Jesus' last breath, that has been the disciples' reality.

Their entire world has been turned upside down, everything they thought they had has been lost in the blink of an eye, and now, even the mere act of going outside feels dangerous. Sound familiar? They have no idea if there are Roman soldiers out there looking for them, seeking to fully and completely squash this Jesus movement once and for all. They don't know what's being said about them, what the world's plans are for them, so they have no choice, but to hunker down within their four little walls, utterly afraid of what is going to happen today, the next day, and the next. Let's face it, fear and isolation are practically the hallmarks of the first Easter.

Then you throw the whole grief mixed with hope thing in there and oof, it all feels too real. If the fear and anxiety weren't enough, the disciples are having to process grief over what can only be described as monumental loss...not just of Jesus which is significant enough, but of their way of life, their mission, their ministry, their purpose, their faith...everything they thought they knew, their normal has been wiped away. They thought Jesus was the Messiah and now he's gone...what are they supposed to do with that? What are they supposed to believe? Three days ago they were men

with a vision of the future and now, are they just supposed to go back to their old jobs, like nothing ever happened? Yet, in the back of their grief-stricken minds, a little wiggle of hope lingers. Didn't he say...on the third day...and yet that hope seems so small, so far away, so intangible, that it leaves them frozen in place, stuck. For them...that first Easter morning, their whole world had stopped.

The same goes for the women who gathered themselves in the early hours of the dawn...their world has stopped too, they're grieving too and confused and lost and have no idea what this means for them, and yet, they go to the tomb because *it's normal*. It's what they're supposed to do. It's grasping at straws of what feels like stability. What do you do when you're a Jewish woman and someone dies? You gather up spices and you go and you anoint the body. You have rituals, steps to follow, things you just do. The world might be spinning into chaos around them, but they have this one thing they can cling to, a process to follow. Everything might feel hard and awful but at least they have this. This one thing they can do.

All of it sounds so much like us it's almost hard to comprehend. We're isolated. We're generally pretty much surrounded by our own four walls and those that are closest to us. Everyone within those walls ebbing and flowing through a variety of emotions from day to day: grief, fear,

worry, anxiety, annoyance, frustration, hope. We cling to those patterns and rhythms that help us feel even remotely stable, that help us feel like the world isn't spinning into chaos all around us. We try to find pockets of hope, glimmers of joy, and when we have them we try to hold them as closely as possible, only to find that they are chased away in the next moment by the reality that lies too starkly in front of us. We don't know what comes next, we worry that because of this everything about our normal lives, when we get back to them is going to change. We worry that maybe nothing will change. We worry we won't know who we are after this. We wonder if it's always going to feel this way... Y'all we're living the reality of Easter morning more than I think we could ever have anticipated, and that would be awful if the message stopped there...but...it doesn't.

Because that's the amazing thing about Easter...even though that morning seemed like a morning just like all the others, it wasn't. Everything changed. The world had stood still and then it got completely rocked sideways by the greatest news the disciples, the women, anyone could ever have imagined...he is not here...he has been raised. And suddenly, all that grief, that loss, that worry, it's kind of left in the dust, because hope is no longer far off or intangible or too small to grasp. It is bright and bold and right in front of them. He is not here and everything has changed. He is not

here and everything can start over again. He is not here and there is no need to be afraid anymore. He is not here, go out and tell someone about it!! In a world where it seemed like all was lost, like death and oppression and the Roman Empire had won, like all the worst forces of the world had triumphed, like nothing would ever be right again...resurrection still had the audacity to show up. Life still had the strength, the gumption to win. God still managed to have the final say. Even when everything said it should be impossible...resurrection still happened, and nothing could stop it. And all I can say is thank God for that, because if there were ever a people that needed a reminder that resurrection wins, that Easter still happens, that God still shows up...it's us.

I know that it might not feel a whole lot like Easter, not like we're used to it feeling. Easter dinners might not look the same, I know mine's gonna happen over Zoom later, which is weird. There are no egg hunts or trips to see family or parties and we aren't together this morning, our alleluias aren't echoing out of the walls and down the sidewalks. I know we feel rather disciple-y this morning. But here's the thing...no matter where we are, no matter what we do, Easter is still here. Resurrection still has happened, still *happens*. Because at the end of the day, Easter isn't about us, it's *for* us, and nothing, not even a pandemic can keep God from giving it to

us. Resurrection is rather stubborn that way, nothing is going to stop it from getting to God's people any way it can.

Which speaking of stubborn resurrection, now might be the time to give you all a little update from last year's Easter sermon. If you remember, or if you weren't here to hear it, last year I preached about my azalea bushes still being alive despite being horizontal in the air courtesy of our 80 foot oak tree coming down in our yard the Monday of Holy Week. Well, y'all...a year later, that tree is gone, and for the first time, that horrid patch of dirt and rocks is actually growing grass. It's darn near close to *green* and you *almost* can't tell that something horrendously awful happened in that front yard. It's taken a hot second to get that grass to grow, but it finally is, because resurrection is stubborn, and one way or another it's always going to show up even when you've stopped thinking it was going to happen or even that it was remotely possible.

And that is a truth our world, our hearts need right now. Resurrection is going to show up. Nothing is going to stop it. You can't stop God when God is determined to show God's people just how much they are loved, particularly when they are in need of that reminder so desperately. God has shown up in deserts spewing water from rocks and manna from heaven. God has shown up in the middle of exile and breathed life into dry bones.

God has shown up in earthquakes that blast open empty tombs. God has shown up in locked up Jerusalem rooms. God has shown up each and everyday that God's people have walked this earth, in thousands of large and small ways, sometimes it just takes a little bit of effort to open our eyes and see the world through resurrection glasses.

So that's what we're going to do this morning, because pandemic or not, social distancing or not, God has shown up this morning, resurrection is all around us, we just gotta put the glasses on. Look around you, wherever you are...I'm serious, actually do it, even if I can't see you to confirm you're listening. Maybe your kids are next to you—playing with LEGOs or playdoh or just rolling around being silly. Maybe your spouse is next to you—sipping their coffee with their slippers on. Maybe out your window there are birds or trees or flowers, bright, blooming, brilliant. Maybe your pet is next to you—curled up in your lap, showing you what unconditional love is. Maybe your phone is next to you with pictures of your family or texts from friends. Maybe your breakfast is in front you, a reminder of daily bread given and provided. Wherever you are, resurrection is right next to you. Maybe big, maybe small, but it's there, stubborn and resolute, reminding you that hope is not some far off wish. It's right before us, because after all...Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!!! **AMEN!!!**