

Natalie W. Bell  
 April 5, 2026  
 Easter

*Are You the One?*  
*John 20:1-18*

*20 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. <sup>2</sup> 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.” <sup>3</sup> Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. <sup>4</sup> The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup> and the cloth that had been on Jesus’s head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed, <sup>9</sup> for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples returned to their homes. <sup>11</sup> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look<sup>[a]</sup> into the tomb, <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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.” <sup>14</sup> When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> 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,<sup>[b]</sup> if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew,<sup>[c]</sup> “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup> Jesus said to her, “Do not touch 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.’” <sup>18</sup> 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.*

*Easter is this amazing story of NEW LIFE!*  
 We need stories like this, stories of HOPE,  
 Because so much in our world is NOT hopeful.

*Every day the news hits us like a ton of bricks....*  
 more war, death, hatred, division, uncertainty and fear....  
 And that's just the stuff happening around us,  
 not to mention the things happening in our own lives!

*Somehow, in the middle of all that pain, we are called to be people of HOPE!*  
 So I wonder, as you come here on today of all days,  
 What the Easter story really means—to **YOU**?  
**For YOU?**

*It's really not any good if it's just a nice story in the Bible.*  
 It needs to hold power and meaning,  
*And real hope, for YOU, today.*

*Did you know that each of the FOUR GOSPELS*  
*has a slightly different account of Easter morning?*  
 Each one is like a different facet of a diamond,  
 Offering a different perspective of Jesus,  
 and the Kingdom of God.

*Matthew* carefully connects Jesus to the Old Testament.  
*Mark*, the oldest Gospel, is short and to the point.  
*Luke* emphasizes miracles, and healings—he was after all, a physician.  
*And John*, the Gospel written last, is the most symbolic—because he had more  
 time to think about it's meaning.

*I love John's deeply PERSONAL story of Mary* seeing Jesus at the empty tomb.

*Luke's version* has a group of women, including Mary  
 And an angel says:  
 “*Why do you look for the living among the dead?*  
*He is not here but has risen....*”

*In Mark 16, the Gospel originally ended with verse 8:*  
 When an angel says to Mary Magdalene and another Mary,  
 “*Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He*  
*has been raised; he is not here. ...But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is*  
*going ahead of you ....So they went out and fled from the tomb, terror and*  
*amazement had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were*  
*afraid.*<sup>[a]</sup>”

Only later manuscripts added the verses that include Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene and others.

And in *Matthew*, we read about Mary Magdalene and another Mary witnessing an earthquake, and the angel announces Jesus resurrection... and they are sent to tell the disciples.

***We can LEARN from each of these accounts!***

We also learn from the story JESUS TELLS about himself in the Gospels. When John the Baptist sends his followers to Jesus, asking '***ARE YOU THE ONE who is to come or should we wait for another?***' Jesus says: "*Go and tell what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> the blind receive sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.....*

Wow.

Isn't that a story WE need to hear?

***The resurrection is not just the triumphal ending to Holy Week and the cross....***

Easter is a ***continuation*** of who Jesus was from the beginning.

Even from the very beginning of CREATION....

which is why the empty tomb happens in a garden, just like the story of creation begins in a garden.

***Easter is the ultimate story of hope because it's the culmination of Jesus life, and death---of who he WAS and IS and is TO COME!***

It is an incredible story of hope and new life,

And we want to hear that this amazing story makes everything better.

***Death is defeated, so everything should be OK, right?***

Only, when we woke up this morning, ***life was still life, wasn't it?***

***We are still struggling*** with pain, and broken families, illness, fear, and anxiety.

Easter hasn't wiped it all away....

***Which is the nature of faith—it's a world of PARADOX,***

Where two things that should cancel each other out, do not.

They both exist.

The Bible says we live in the '***already and not yet***'—

Jesus has already come, he's already been raised...

but has not yet returned to set everything right for eternity.  
 And Jesus said things like *those who lose their lives for my sake will find them*,  
 Paul claims that *when we are weak, then we are strong*.

We believe in this transformative story of resurrection,  
*That truly CHANGES everything....*  
*even as we face the SAME circumstances.*

*Which brings us to the idea of JOY.*

Not happiness.

Happiness is based on *external circumstances, and good feelings*.

Joy is deeper.

You **CANNOT be happy and sad** at the same time,

But you **CAN be joyful and sad**---in the same moment.

Author Kate Bowler puts it this way:

*joy is the moment when we know the goodness of our life.*

*Not when our life is easy.*

*Not when everything has gotten better.*

*But when, suddenly and briefly,*

*the goodness of being alive becomes unmistakable.*

*That's why joy feels so powerful. For a moment everything seems illuminated.*

*Life feels meaningful, maybe even whole.*

*And yet... joy almost NEVER FIXES anything.*

*It doesn't resolve the unanswered questions. Or solve grief.*

*It doesn't suddenly make the future predictable....*

*In fact, joy often appears in the strangest places...like in the middle of a hospital room when nothing about the situation has improved.*

*It can even appear at a funeral, which feels so disorienting you almost hate yourself.....*

*No, joy does NOT REMOVE sorrow.*

*It simply appears beside it.*

*Which is why I've come to think of joy as something even bigger than an emotion.*

*Joy is an argument for LIFE itself....the sudden, stubborn conviction that life — this beautiful, fragile life — is still worth loving.*

Kate Bowler from Everything Happens, The Problem of Paradox, April 1, 2026, substack.

***Easter is a story of JOY...discovered in a graveyard...after a horrible death.***  
 Easter brings joy to our crazy lives,  
 And a world gone mad.

***How do we FIND this joy?***  
***We have to pay ATTENTION to the stories of hope and new life—***  
 In the *Gospels*,  
 In the lives of *people* around us,  
 In our *own lives*.  
 We have to ***TELL stories of hope, and LISTEN*** to them....

***Here we have the WITNESS of Mary Magdalene—***  
 Who is mentioned in all four Gospels, in a time when women were only property,  
 and their testimony was not admissible!  
 But Jesus had healed her of demons,  
 She traveled with him and the disciples,  
 She saw Jesus crucified,  
 And she was there at the empty tomb on Easter morning!

***She is also the FIRST to proclaim the good news of Easter!***  
 (AKA the first woman preacher!)  
 And some of the latest theological research suggests that she might have been the  
***first to identify Jesus as Messiah!*** She brought Good News!

***My sister just saw someone who shares good news.***  
***Steve Hartman of CBS—who was speaking at a Tulsa Town Hall.***  
 I love his work—his segment on the Friday evening news, called:  
*On the Road With Steve Hartman*  
 Is about great stories of people making a difference in the world,  
 people sharing kindness and love.

During the pandemic he did an online series called ***“Kindness 101”***  
 Starring his own kids...teaching how to share kindness everywhere.  
 And most recently he won accolades for his documentary called:  
***“All the Empty Rooms”***, about families who lost kids to school shootings.

***Steve Hartman shares a simple, yet profound message***  
***of GOOD news in our bad news world.***  
 A message of hope, in a world that seems bent on despair.

He reminds us that there is more kindness in the world than we realize,  
And we can share that.

***Violence, pain, and hatred---rule the headlines.***

Kindness, hope and new life usually don't make the news.

***So it's up to US, as people of faith to share those stories,***

***To be witnesses to hope.***

And we can do that because Jesus is our Savior, because of his ***ministry***,

His gift of love on the ***cross***,

And especially because of his ***resurrection***.

***Easter is more than just 'believing' in the resurrection of Jesus---***

It's about finding new life--- today!

I read an article this week by Amy Frykholm,

And her visit to a place called ***Magdalene House***,

For women exiting prison, drugs and lives of prostitution.

And what she noticed most of all

was the power of ***these women telling their STORIES***.

The ***ones who SHARED their stories*** actually found healing.

The ones who ***kept it all inside suffered***, much more.

***Healing*** came from stories, and others giving ***witness*** to those stories.

And many of those stories were about finding hope, life, and resurrection.

Amy Frykholm, We Are Witnesses, April 13, 2025, Journeywithjesus.com.

***Isn't that true in our lives?***

***What is YOUR story?***

What is the story of ***God's work in YOUR life?***

It's not IF God has done something in your life...but WHAT God has done!

When was the last time ***you listened*** to the stories of people around you?

When have you ***asked someone—what is God doing in your life?***

I mean, isn't that the ***ultimate question of faith?***

***Who do you know—who needs that QUESTION?***

Whose ***story do you need to HEAR?***

And ***how can you SHARE your own story***, this week?

As an act of hope—and new life!

*It's a brutal world out there...and Easter happens right in the middle of it.  
Easter is THE life-giving story of hope, and new life.*

Jesus is alive...for you...for me.

That is the *Good News of the Gospel* this Easter,

And for that *story of hope*,

All God's people can say together, Amen.