

What is Your Easter Story?

Spring has returned. Who among us isn't joyful when we saw the sun after all a few days of rain and cooler temperatures? Once again, nature reminds us that we humans are not in charge of everything; there are forces in life smarter and stronger beyond our control. Even so, the sun again shines on our faces. We are grateful for the gift of life.

An Easter story – after darkness and despair comes a new day with the promise of new beginnings. We welcome another springtime into our lives. It is good to see life return again to our earth. Deep inside, we carry an urge to celebrate spring's return, feel just like dancing, shouting hallelujah, or just remembering our ancestors' journey who celebrated spring's promise of a new life spoken in the Hymn of Promise.

Spring is like a homecoming. We celebrate, as they did, with good food and bright flowers, colored eggs and sweets. We play, as they did, out in the open air, if our bodies allow. Or we soak up rays of sunlight, the beauty of green leaves, blue sky.

We gather today to welcome spring; I also invite you to experience another Easter into your lives. Maybe it's been a long winter, for your body, for your soul or mind. Perhaps you come here today looking full of life, but knowing there are inside places where you feel dry, weary, not quite alive. Maybe the stone has not yet been rolled away. Like nature cycles from winter to spring, our souls, too, can cycle into times of cold and stillness, hiding new life.

Whoever you are, whatever your age, wherever your life journey has taken you, there is something for you in the Easter story. Whatever your faith tradition, whatever your beliefs, however, you name the Holy, the Easter story can speak to your life.

I knew as a small child, the story was important. I didn't understand. In mom's kitchen the day before Easter, we watched her boil water then poured into coffee cups. Each filled with vinegar and a solid-colored table. Eggs we raised on the farm. We would wash and dry, and slowly we let them down into the cups, trying not to break them. Stirring with a teaspoon, we see the colored we had. Colored Easter eggs used multiple times: hiding them with my brother and sister, then cousins. At church, hide and seek with Easter eggs. My favorite part was, after hours of fun, was to consume

them. Some sprinkled with a dash of salt spread on top, others devil-eggs, and my favorite, egg sandwich with mayo with mom's homemade sweet pickles, salt, and pepper.

I knew Easter was important. On Sunday morning, mom would get my older brother, younger sister ready, then finally me, in our best Sunday outfits. Clean shirt, pants, clip-on tie, and shiny black shoes.

After church, hearing about The Story, I would see the flower cross in front of the church, not understanding. We would sit down to Sunday's Easter meal. Mom's BBQ chicken, green beans, mash potatoes, homemade light rolls, chocolate cake with sweet ice tea.

And then, we would go to a place I thought was strange. Dad would load all of us up in the car, drive to Friedberg Moravian church which seemed like an eternity. It was only 15 minutes, and go to the graveyard. Dad would take us around each family plot and tell us stories about people I didn't know. Then he would say something strange: meeting them again, one day?

Over time, I begin to understand the story. Going to God's Acre in Winston Salem for Sunrise service, listening to an opposing brass band calling out to each other celebrating an empty grave. These Stories slowly revealed themselves. They were seeds planted. At the age of thirteen, I experienced The Story. What's your Easter Story? Where did your journey begin?

The Easter story is told and experienced in many different ways. Three women before daybreak go to do what was needed but not during Sabbath. I am sure the memories rushed through their mind heading to the grave. Jesus rides into Jerusalem for Passover, defying the Roman government. Jesus sees pain and hardship all around. Sees people abused, Held in slavery, hurting one another, fighting, and war.

Jesus carried a dream of a new way for people to live together –a world where all people would have enough, be free, live together in peace. Jesus called this new way “the Kingdom of God.” A way grounded in two of his basic teachings: "Love One Another" and treat other people like the way you treat yourself." The story has many

images.

There's a story about a fictional Ragman, a young man, handsome and strong, walking city alleys pulling an old cart filled with bright, new clothes. He was singing out in a clear, tenor voice: "Rags!" "Rags! New rags for old! I take your tired one, and I'll give you mine. Rags! Rags!" As he journeyed, he encountered a weeping woman, bleeding, banded, young child, and a one-armed man. At each encounter, he took upon himself their infirmities. Finally climbing a hill on garage hip and dies, while each of them became whole. Rags, rags, old rags for new rags, you give me your rags, and you take mine. The story goes.

Jesus rode into town, offering people what they could not see- a new life. At his last meal, his disciple could not see, or understand, or what was about to happen or why. This last meal with his disciple would end on Friday nailed to a cross. The story could have ended with his death on Good Friday. His disciples were devastated, upset by his death. They scattered in all directions, the women remained.

Before daybreak, the women go to the cave to see Jesus's body and to care for it with special oils. When the women arrive at Jesus's tomb, they find it empty. Jesus's body was not there. The stone rolled away. The women are frightened; they don't know what to think. Then an angel tells them, "Jesus is not here. The tomb is empty. He has risen."

What do we make of this story? Some believed. Others think that's impossible. Others doubts, but some choose to allow for the possibility.

The Easter story tells us the rags we wear, regardless of what they are, do not have the final say. Out of darkness comes light and new life. I look out this morning, and I see Easter people.

By God's grace, the stone rolled away from the tomb of our soul. Journeys of profound grief, disabling addictions, crippling despair, self-doubt, indifference, or past mistakes took away. You have found your way back to life. When you have an Easter experience, you know, without a doubt, the abiding truth of the Easter story when all seems lost, new life emerges-Worthy is the Lamb. The cross was God's way of picking up our tab. It was His way of saying: "I forgive you." The cross is the bridge to God's

forgiveness., invited to walk across.

As Easter people, we know that every day can be an Easter. We all carry in our souls the beginnings of new life in Christ. Jesus taught, turn to the good shepherd, transformed from the old into a new way, born again. These beginnings of new life are what the poet calls "remnants of resurrection. It might be only a scrap or a fragment of hope; maybe a hint, a whisper of possibility -- may be a single encouraging word, or a single line of song, or music itself. It is enough to allow us to blossom into a new life. It is the journey of the cross.

What seeds of new life do you carry? What "remnant of resurrection" needs to be unwrapped for new life to bloom? I know without a doubt that you carry within you the seeds of hope and a new life because He has risen from the grave. What is your Easter story? As you procession today and look at the flower cross of Jesus, let us lift high the cross within and without for all to see. He has risen. He has risen indeed.