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ECY  
Easter Sunday 2023

I was talking to a friend of mine this week about our weekend plans and she said, ‘You know, I hate Easter.’ And if you can believe it, her language was *actually* saltier than I can repeat in church. At least from the pulpit anyway.

This woman — about my age, a lifelong Episcopalian, on vestries, altar guilds, search committees, her kids at an Episcopal school - she has drunk all the church Kool-Aid there is to possibly drink. She’s now in the ordination process to become a priest at perhaps the pinnacle of her career as a corporate lawyer.

And Easter Day, of all days— ick. That was all she said. Ick. The pastels, the baskets, the tulips in a vase.

And I have to wonder: for how many people is this true? They’re good with Maundy Thursday when Jesus is betrayed by Judas; they know what it feels like to be betrayed by a friend, or a spouse. They know rejection.

They get Good Friday, the arrest, the execution of Jesus; they know the agony of seeing death swallow up a life, they know loss, and they know what it feels like when the worst possible thing that could ever happen... happens.

But Easter, pastel-colored Easter? *Nope. Hate it. Waaay too* sunny a story to feel like mine today.

I have to believe that perhaps part of you is thinking this. Sure, it's Easter, but Mom still has cancer. My future — I had it all mapped out and now it feels like it's falling apart. For some, it may feel that the “pastel Easter” is all there is and it belongs to other people today.

So you politely nod at the Gospel, at me. You wonder if we're having Chipotle tonight. (We're not. It's closed.) You think about your April and what's due this week and you hope that this service moves quickly. (It will).

And if that's even a small part of you, let me tell you something: you're not alone.

This morning's passage shows us how *one woman* awoke at dawn to anoint Jesus' body. But out of the frame, off-stage, is *literally everyone else*. The rest of Jesus' followers are not part of this scene, not yet anyway. Perhaps they were finally asleep after a night spent lying awake, tormenting themselves with what they could have done differently that day, as if it would have changed anything. Perhaps they drank to drown their sorrows. They may have been filled with self-loathing, like the worst friends in the world, running away when they should have stayed put at the foot of the Cross. It was not a happy time.

Laden with difficult emotions, *everyone else stayed home* that morning.

And just maybe, there are a few of us gathered today who identify more with *those* folks than with the woman who runs to the tomb.

My friend who says she "hates Easter" — I suspect that there are deeper reasons. She's got three young kids, and two are on a spectrum — two of the many spectrums human beings can fall on — autism spectrum, gender identity, Asperger's, fetal alcohol, ADHD, sensory processing, — and one has terrible anxiety, one

of the world's most contagious emotions — and her day-to-day is *hard*. And it's messy.

Like most of us, she wants the Good News that *erases* those challenges and worries. She is everyone who wants the Easter message to be permanent relief from the burdens we carry, an *undoing* of the bad things that have happened, an assurance that actual good news will follow — you got the fellowship! You got an A in French! (OK, a B in French!) You won the election!

Well, I'm going to let you all in on something: if this is you, you are *exactly why* the Resurrection happened. It happened this way *for you*.

Easter is not the holiday of the aggressively optimistic, who shield their eyes from hurt and pain, and push all difficult feelings away. Who tell you to see the silver linings, to start a gratitude journal or to “be mindful.” Who only want sunshine. And you know why Easter is not for them? Because there is no Christian holiday for that. Not one.

Remember: the last time we saw Jesus this week he was hanging on a cross and when finally dead, moved to a tomb. The bad guys had won. And if that wasn't bad enough, it got worse! We don't see it, but he then descended into the depths of hell. And if you think to yourself, I cannot even imagine what hell looks like, oh yes you can. We all have been there.

Jesus descended and then arose *from those depths*. They are all part of the same movement. Like flowers growing from the darkness underfoot, out of sight, finally bursting through the semi-frozen topsoil, a bit messy. This is *real* Easter. Pastel Easter, what my friend actually detests, is the cut daffodils in a vase, the seeing the flower but not the growth, the darkness, the bud.

Real Easter is the long growth underground.

And God did it *this* way — God allowed all of this to happen to his only Son — so that Jesus himself could assure each of us again and again that there is no darkness he hasn't already visited, no middle-of -the-night fear he hasn't seen before. And he sees ours, and he is in it with us, not standing there impatiently waiting for us to cheer up so he can start the Easter egg hunt. He has all day for us, everyday.

And that is the good news for each of us: that the risen Jesus, liberated from the limits of an ordinary human life, can sit in your pain with you and with me in mine *at the same time*. We don't have to wait in line. It's not a competition. I spoke with a student once during an excruciating breakup and he once gingerly mentioned relying on God and then, embarrassed, walked it back, saying, "I know God has a lot of bigger problems to worry about right now than my relationship status." No, he doesn't! God, amazingly, has all the time in the world for you and for me. For each of us.

God isn't going to change this student's ex-girlfriend's mind. He's not going to get them back together. That relationship ended. And this is the promise of Easter: death and decline happen, but they are not the end of the story. New life, somehow awaits us. Transformation occurs. This student fought the break up out of deep fear only to discover later that he had been liberated from something he now sees as kind of unhealthy. He was centered and content when we last spoke. Hopeful.

We've sanitized the Easter story but the Resurrection was really messy. There is weeping and running. There is confusion, doubt,

disbelief. It was really surprising. The disciples don't even recognize the risen Jesus when he appears to them. Days later the disciples will literally lock themselves in a room because they are afraid this news is spreading and it will send the authorities after them next. We pastel color this day, and imagine the disciples hugging and laughing, practically carrying helium balloons and popping champagne. It wasn't like that.

Easter Sunday — the pastel kind, the overly-optimistic kind — deep down we *should* hate that. It's not true.

The good news of real Easter is not that our hardships are magically erased. The Resurrection does not rewind the clocks so all that awful stuff never happened and will never happen again. The good news is that we now have in the Risen Jesus a companion who sees every second of our struggles and loves us so much in them that together, we can actually face them. Who assures us that there is no circumstance whatsoever, no decline, — not even death its very self — that Jesus cannot transform into new life.

Pastel Easter with its good news without the bad; its cut flowers in the vase — it isn't *real*. Real Easter, born out of darkness, messy

and surprising, is beautiful, it's real. — this is what we celebrate today.

And I have to believe: someone here needs to hear that.

Amen.