

**Come Holy Spirit and fill us with the fire of your love. Renew us, Sweet Spirit, for surely you are with us, strengthen us that we would spill your love out and renew the world around us as Jesus' love renews our hope. As we draw closer to you, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight...you who are Rock, Redeemer & Renewer of us all. Amen.**

My Lord, what a morning. Christ is risen! Christ is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

This is the day the Lord has made – let us rejoice and be glad in it! Alleluia!

You may think I'm a bit crazy but it's a Glorious Day! Our God has overcome the chains and bindings of sin & death. Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Of course, Mary, Peter & John couldn't believe it... couldn't wrap their heads around an open tomb, a missing body... and then there were the angels.

Who could make sense of such a thing after all that had happened three days ago... the arrest, the joke of a trial, the crowd in a frenzy, the beating and torture and suffering, the crucifixion, the darkness, and now this... his body is missing!

Mary is still in disbelief as Peter & John return to the others.

Only now does Mary peer into the tomb and sees the two angels who ask why she is crying. She confesses her dismay and then turns to see a person she thinks is the Gardner. Asked the same question, why are you crying, and also a follow up question, Who are you looking for? Mary responds with insistent despair, wanting to know where the body has been put. It is then that Jesus speaks her name and Mary recognizes Jesus' presence. (This is a direct connection to Jesus' saying I am the shepherd, who calls the name and the sheep recognize and follow.)

Keeping her touch at a distance, Mary is given the task to **go and tell** the brothers & sisters that he is risen and going to Father God. And away she goes to share the good news... He is alive; he is risen, just as he promised.

For those of us 20 centuries removed, this is the old, old story that gets shared every year. Do you get tired of it? Do you ever share it with anyone? Do you even believe it?

If you're not certain about this story... you are not alone! It is hard to understand with 21<sup>st</sup> century minds, just as it was in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. However, I trust this to be a truth.

- I trust that the disciples don't understand all that Jesus taught them.
- I trust that in the heat of the trial & the suffering, Jesus' followers were in shock at the rapid shift in tenor & tone... from Hosannas to sorrows. They could not believe their trusted Teacher would be hung from a cross and die.
- I trust their dismay & disbelief.

Remember Peter's response when Jesus told the disciples he would suffer death & in three days rise? 'OH, no Lord you can't do that! You're the Messiah who comes to save us', says Peter. And Jesus said, 'get back behind me Satan, you talking like the world talks. I'm not of this world', what did Jesus say while on trial... 'My kingdom is not of this world'.

So if you're wondering, and having trouble believing, it okay... you are not alone; you're in the crowd with Peter, Mary and all the others. And I was right there with you... until my life fell into a deep dark hole full of despair, dismay, and grief.

On a dark and starry night I cried out to that God way out there somewhere and wondered how it could be that everything was falling apart?

The crazy thing is I realized God heard me! A star, a streak of light, flew across the sky and my heart was filled with a presence of warmth...like it could have been glowing... and a gentle breeze rustled past me ... and I knew Creator, Redeemer, Renewer was real...was present and I would be okay, even in the midst of pain, loss, separation, change. I had no answers, but I knew there was a way...and God was ready & willing if I was able to allow God to order my steps and guide my life.

Maybe you've cried out too... from the bottom of a pit... maybe you've felt the desolation and the fear and the grief and suffering. Maybe there are angels nearby just waiting for you to peek into the darkness of an empty tomb and ask why are crying so you can around and meet the Gardner and recognize the voice of your Savior in the hands and feet of a friend.

In that moment, Mary hears the compassion, the love that Jesus had for her speaking her name in her weeping and sorrow and fear and loss. In that moment, Mary can take heart that it is her Lord Jesus the Christ!

Friends, Easter is about overcoming the chains and bindings of sin and death... and the power that does that is Love... God's love poured out through Jesus' life and death so that he could be raised to new life and resurrection by an unfathomable, unbelievable love that would offer forgiveness for what was done to him; for care & provision of care for his Mother & his friend; for the promise that the thief next to him would be with him in paradise that very day; and that he gave his life that we, you & me would be free.

Yes we celebrate this is the day the Lord has made... for God kept the promise of renewal and resurrection by loving the world so much that Jesus would die so that we would have new life forever.

Let us pray: O God, your love is unimaginable! When we feel we are lost & left & alone remind us that you have already shown us the way, and how our journey will end, with you forever. On this Easter morning you have shown the world that when human hate, human anger, human greed, human prejudice and human violence have done their worst, your love, which never leaves us, has the final word in our lives and in human history. Give us the faith to let your love see us through, and to mirror that love to others. Amen.