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## A New Dawn, A New Day

Matthew 28:1-10

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“Bird flying high—you know how I feel.  
Sun in the sky—you know how I feel.  
Breeze drifting by—you know how I feel.  
It's a new dawn,  
It's a new day,  
It's a new life for me,  
And I'm feeling good.”

If Resurrection Sunday had a soundtrack, certainly Michael Bublé's “Feeling Good” would be near the top of that list. Bublé recorded his jazzy hit song in 2005 in front of a brassy big band and a full orchestra. It's one you want to roll the windows down and invite the neighbors to enjoy along with you. “It really slaps”, as the kids say. Yet, that iconic arrangement is far from the song's original expression in the little-known 1964 musical, *The Roar of the Greasepaint – The Smell of the Crowd*, written by British composers Anthony Newley and Leslie Bricusse. The musical was created to be political satire—a parable—which critiqued the class system in England during the mid 1900s.

Among the characters representing the “haves” and the “have nots”, it was the most marginalized character who sings what was supposed to be just a minor song in the show. Gilbert Price sang the part when the musical came to Broadway in 1965 from the UK. Price steps onto center stage having fought for his dignity against his oppressors and wins a rigged game of life while the others argue over the rules on the sidelines.

James Baldwin said: “Freedom is not something that anybody can be given; freedom is something people take and people are as free as they want to be.”

The jazzy feel-good song we know today, was first a song of heartbreak and sadness that poured out of the frustrations of life. "Feeling Good" quickly became an anthem of triumph and liberation, especially for marginalized peoples. It was called a "booming song of emancipation."

"And this old world is a new world  
And a bold world for me.  
Stars when you shine—you know how I feel.  
Scent of the pine—you know how I feel.  
Freedom is mine—I *know* how I feel.  
It's a new dawn; it's a new day;  
It's a new life for me.  
Feeling good."

You hear it differently when you know the context, don't you? This is resurrection language. *Feeling good* on Easter Sunday is still quite complicated, isn't it? But that's the thing about Easters—they keep coming regardless of what is happening in the world. Just like Spring . . . no matter how hardened, cracked, and wounded winter has left the ground, Spring always comes, as the last word, with its hopeful power to heal and restore. The reformer, Martin Luther said: "Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone but in every leaf in springtime."

Today *is* a day for feeling good! Not because everything is right—and maybe quite the opposite—but because when you are on the side of love, you have the most powerful force in the world. Without question! A power so potent it can heal even the hardest places. I hope you will give yourself to the work of love today!

The Gospel of Matthew chapter 28 says that when the *new day had dawned*, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were on their way to the tomb where Jesus had been laid. And after the encounter with the angel and the empty tomb, the Marys quickly left with fear and great joy. I wish we were brave enough to end the story there? Before we have a chance to form that encounter into a systematic theology . . . before we can properly exegete that experience and decide on what doctrinal statements will bolster our faith and belief. Before we can reason out what place fear even has as a partner to joy.

I wish we were bold enough to let those two just sit with the other. Is that the place from which life-changing awe comes? Have we so domesticated the Easter story, that we are hardly left changed when we peer into that dark, empty tomb—To be confronted with the messiness of life and somehow run to share with others that there is still joy and hope? The message that “He is not here, he is risen” is at once the highest expression of our joy in Christ—“Jesus Christ is Risen Today, Alleluia!”—and also a moment of terror.

The Marys were already stunned at the death of their friend and leader. They were pious enough to wait through the Passover weekend, but they showed up as early as they could ready to honor the dead, with whatever strength they had left. They could not have been prepared for a risen Christ. What if we embraced it for what it was: a moment of confusion and yet possibility. Any transformational moment will hold for us both terror and hope . . . it doesn't ask of us to have it all figured out, how it's all going to play out, only that we take the very next step.

Frederick Buechner said, “Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid.” It sometimes takes the absurd to jolt us from our expectations of what is possible. What if the resurrected life isn't having “blessed” on your license plate, or a perfectly curated social media page, but the ability to just keep showing up to anoint the sacred, with whatever strength we can muster, willing to be surprised by the unexpected?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor and theologian, writing during the 1930s while imprisoned, because of the formation of his underground seminary and his involvement in anti-Nazi activity and opposition to Hitler.” He said this of Easter: “It is from the Resurrection of Christ that a new and purifying wind can blow through our present world. . . . If a few people really believed that and acted on it in their daily lives, a great deal would be changed. To live in the light of the Resurrection—that is what Easter means.”

Church, what would it look like to live as resurrection people—not because we particularly feel like it, maybe today you aren't necessarily “feeling good” in our war-torn world—but to make it so by choosing love over hate, to deny the lure of the ego and choose to pursue justice and flourishing for neighbor, even when it costs us something.

Being a person of the resurrection isn't asking you to believe the unbelievable. It's asking whether you will resist despair, even when all evidence gives you reason to the contrary, and keep your eyes on that hopeful horizon.

Poet Howard Thurman called it the "growing edge". By now, you probably know that Thurman is one of my poetic and intellectual heroes. In his words: "All around us worlds are dying and new worlds are being born; all around us life is dying and life is being born. The fruit ripens on the tree, the roots are silently at work in the darkness of the earth against a time when there shall be new lives, fresh blossoms, green fruit. Such is the growing edge! It is the extra breath from the exhausted lung, the one more thing to try when all else has failed, the upward reach of life when weariness closes in upon all endeavor. This is the basis of hope in moments of despair, the incentive to carry on when times are out of joint, the source of confidence when worlds crash and dreams whiten into ash. Look well to the growing edge!"

What can Easter mean for us today?

When we say, "Christ is Risen,"  
we are saying that life will always have the last word

When we say, "Christ is Risen,"  
we are saying that we no longer have to stay shrouded in our tombs of shame or guilt.

When we say, "Christ is Risen,"  
it is to claim liberation from "this is just the way it is" or what everyone else insists is "normal."

When we say, "Christ is Risen,"  
it is to claim that we too can rise up against the oppressors.

When we say, "Christ is Risen,"  
we are saying that no one gets to tell you what is most true about yourself or the limits of what is possible.

When we say, "Christ is Risen,"  
we are not just making a historical statement but claiming a present reality here and now as it will always be.

When we say, "Christ is Risen,"  
we are saying that love will always be stronger than hate.

So when I say, "Christ is risen,"  
claim this with me by responding,  
"Christ is risen, indeed!"

Christ is risen! **Christ is risen, indeed!**

Happy Easter. Amen.