

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. 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." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in the disciples returned and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 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. 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." When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?" supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to 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.'" 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.

'Early on the first day of the week while it was still dark . . .'

John 20:1a

In his reflection on Proverbs 2:3-5 (If you indeed cry out for insight, and raise your voice for understanding; if you seek it like silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.) Rev. Amlin wrote in 'Easter Eggs:'

I can still conjure up the feeling of being a kid on Easter morning, the magic of waking up to a world transformed, in which the mundane landscape of my house had become surprising and sweet. Every once-boring baseboard had to be scoured for its secrets. The vase I had never noticed needed triple-checking. Every taken-for-granted couch cushion had to be overturned and unzipped, just in case. Proverbs says the pursuit of insight should be like that; finding the knowledge of God like popping open that plastic shell for chocolate. I know that feeling. The first Bible class I took in college. The first small group I attended. The first time I read 'The Long Loneliness.' Suddenly, life is remade; you talk to anyone who will listen; you read everything you can find; you realize you are on the trail of something sweet. Still, most of the time I walk around as if the world weren't full of such Easter eggs, as if I had never experienced the shock of the knowledge of God, peeking out from around the next corner. "That vase? It's empty! Those couch cushions? Nothing to see." Then a friend comes to talk, and he has a look on his face like he's just struck silver. And I remember and it's back to the hunt. (UCC Daily Devotional, April 28, 2016).

I got back to the hunt when I heard Ken Medenna's gospel tune, 'Easter Gives You Wings.'

Verse 1

Rise up Simeon Peter, you whose hopes have gone,
The night is over now and its time to breathe the dawn,
The one who called you by the sea and gave your name to you
Has risen from the grave and he has work for you to do.

Chorus

For He has made you a life to a future that's an open doorway,
He has made you a life to a radically new kind of love,
He has made you a life through the power of God
To turn your life around.

Rise up Simeon Peter, lift your voice and sing!
O, rise up Peter, Easter gives you wings!

The best sermon for today has already been preached by Mary
Magdalene when she went and announced to the disciples,

"I have seen the Lord!"

John 20:18

In her book, "Laughter from Heaven," Barbara Johnson shared this story: A woman was dying. A pastor was summoned and he attempted to comfort her, but to no avail. "I am lost," she said. "I have ruined my life and every life around me. Now I'm going to hell. There is no hope for me." The pastor saw a framed picture of a young girl on the dresser. "Who is this?" he asked. The woman brightened. "She's my daughter, the one beautiful thing in my life." "And would you help her if she were in trouble or made a mistake? Would you forgive her? Would you still love her?" "Of course I would!" cried the woman. "I would do anything for her! Why do you ask such a question?" "Because I want you to know," said the pastor, "that God has a picture of you on the Lord's dresser." Continuing Love's song, Ken sings:

Verse 2

Rise up Mary Magdalene, though you a sorted past,
The one who gave your life to you has conquered death at last.
You will be among the first to see him on this day.
For love has made him rise and love will never go away.

Chorus

For He has made you a life to a future that's an open doorway.
He has made you a life to a radically new kind of love.
He has made you a life through the power of God
To turn your life around
Rise up Mary Magdalene, lift your voice and sing!
O, rise up Mary, Easter gives you wings!

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, "I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and to your God." (John 20:17)

Theologian Barbara Brown Taylor writes: Death is natural. Loss is natural. Grief is natural. But those stones have been rolled away this happy morning to reveal the highly unnatural truth. By the light of this day, God has planted a seed of life in us that cannot be killed, and if we remember that then there is nothing we cannot do: move mountains, banish fear, love our enemies, change the world. The only thing we cannot do is hold on to him. He has asked us please not to do that, because he knows that all in all we would rather keep him with us where we are than let him take us where he is going. Better we should let him hold on to us, perhaps. Better we should let him take us into the white hot presence of God, who is not behind us but ahead of us, every step of the way. (Home by Another Way, p. 12)

With faith in the seed of God's life that cannot be killed, Ken sings:

Verse 3

Rise up disciples with wonder and surprise,
Pentecost is coming, they'll be fire in your eyes.
Rise you friends of his, get your hopes up off the ground,
For soon the sea of you will turn the whole world upside down.

Chorus

For He has made you a life to a future that's an open door way.
He has made you a life to a radically new kind of love.
He has made you a life through the power of God
To turn your life around,
Rise new creation! Lift your voice and sing!
Easter gives you wings! Easter gives you wings!