



Live
FOR A
CHANGE

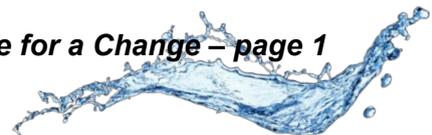
An Easter Journey from Sacredise.com

Live FOR A CHANGE

An Easter Journey

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Johannesburg



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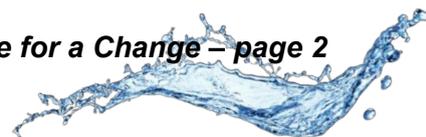
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An Easter Journey

After a year of COVID-19 lockdowns almost the entire human population finds itself longing for the pandemic to be over. The desperation to go out into the world without physical distancing, sanitising, and masks is almost palpable no matter where we may go. It's like we are all asking ourselves a question we hardly even considered before: Is there life after death? For some this question relates to the shattering reality of the physical death of a loved one. For others, it relates to the 'little deaths' of loss of work, loss of income, loss of privacy, loss of safety, or loss of a relationship.

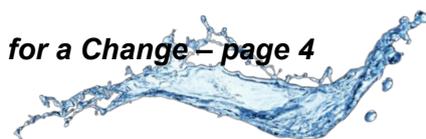
The season of Easter speaks deeply and comfortingly into this climate of fear, depression, and hopelessness. And a significant part of the message of Easter is the call to *live*. Not to go back to what the mindless existence we called living before the pandemic. But rather to real living—the abundant, vibrant, adventurous, creative living, that leaves us breathless with wonder and joy. And as we learn to dive more deeply into this life, so we inevitably find things changing in our personal lives and in our homes, neighbourhoods, and world.

Easter is a fifty-day journey that explores the meaning and implications of the resurrection of Christ. The point of the season is not to rehash an ancient miracle story. It is to open us to experience the fullness of life that Jesus preached about. Easter is not primarily Jesus' story. It is our story and the story of our universe. It is not a once-off event, but a cosmic reality that plays out every moment.

LIVE FOR A CHANGE

LIVE FOR A CHANGE is a liturgical guide that is designed to lead you into a deep experience of resurrection. It examines eight encounters that various people had with the Risen Christ and draws us into the experience so that we can touch the life that the Biblical characters found.

LIVE FOR A CHANGE includes full scripts for every week of the Easter season up to the week before Pentecost (Pentecost will kick off the next liturgical guide). Together they promise to make the Holy Week journey a deeply meaningful and transforming experience. Each week you will find prayers, liturgies, sermon starters, response rituals, and practices that people can take with them into the coming week.



FOR SMALL GROUPS

I believe that the learning and discipleship element of small groups is best done in connection with each Sunday's congregational worship. For this reason, *LIVE FOR A CHANGE* doesn't have separate small group resources. I recommend, rather, that the groups be invited to use the prayers and hymns from the Sunday service as they gather, that they return to the reading and message of the week, and that they share together in the response ritual. In addition, group members can support and challenge each other in their practice of the rituals that are carried into each week. This format creates a safe and open space for the group to engage more deeply in conversation and application around the Sunday theme.

FOR PERSONAL DEVOTION

The best devotional practice is inseparably connected with both corporate worship and small group reflection. Instead of following a completely different resource, or having to wade through even more words, it is more effective for us to return to the words that we have already heard and received in our communal worship and reflect more deeply on them. And then we can engage with what we are learning practically by repeating the response practices from our Sunday worship, and by being intentional about integrating our learning into our lives in practical ways through the integration practices that are offered at the close of each week's worship. This is the approach that is embraced in *LIVE FOR A CHANGE*.

In order to facilitate this devotional approach in your congregation, I recommend that you give people some way to remember the message they have heard in the preaching—by encouraging them to take their own notes, or by handing out pre-printed summary notes. In addition, it can be helpful to ensure that the response and integration practices are available for easy reference so that people can engage with them during the week. This can either be included in the handouts, or people can be invited to write the practices down before they leave the worship.

Alternatively, social media can also be used to engage people more deeply with these practices in their own time, and video or audio recordings of the sermon can be included as well.

My hope is that *LIVE FOR A CHANGE* will help you to create a meaningful and moving liturgical experience for your community. The resurrection life that the Easter story reveals is available to us all right here and now. My prayer is that *LIVE FOR A CHANGE* will help you and your community to experience the reality of resurrection a little more in your own lives.

Grace
John



Life

Chapter One: Easter Sunday

PREPARING

Call to Worship

Give thanks to the LORD, for God is good!

God's faithful love endures forever.

Let all Israel repeat:

God's faithful love endures forever.

The LORD is my strength and my song;

God has given me victory.

Songs of joy and victory are sung in the camp of the godly.

The strong right arm of the LORD has done glorious things!

The strong right arm of the LORD is raised in triumph.

The strong right arm of the LORD has done glorious things!

The stone that the builders rejected

has now become the cornerstone.

This is the LORD's doing,

and it is wonderful to see.

This is the day the LORD has made.

We will rejoice and be glad in it.

(Psalm 118:1-2, 14-16, 22-24 NLT adapted)

Prayer of Praise and Confession

It's strange that today the world doesn't look all that different;

We would have expected things to have changed,

for everything to be somehow brighter,

more vibrant, more alive;

But that's not really how resurrection works,

is it God?

Today you ask us to see differently;

to look beyond our unchanged world,

to look past everything that seems so much the same,

and see the Life that pulses through it all,

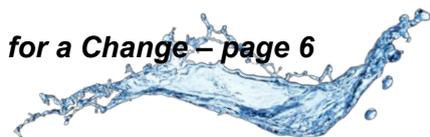
that has always been there,

hidden, yet present.

And when we allow you to open our eyes and our hearts

we discover that resurrection isn't so much

something that happens around us,



but something that happens within us,
something that changes us and how we live
in this ordinary, unchanged world.

***And so we celebrate your abundant, vibrant, unquenchable Life,
that is within us and in all things even now,
that changes us and empowers us and inspires us
to live fully and freely.***

***Forgive us when we become blind to your Life,
when we forget that death is not the final word,
and when we settle for less
than the vibrant, creative life you want for us.***

***Thank you that your life never stops working within us and through us,
and thank you for this day which reminds us
that death always leads to new Life.***

Amen.

LISTENING

Hearing the Sacred Text

John 20:1-9

Sermon Starter

In 2015 someone posted a photograph of a dress on Tumblr that caused worldwide arguments. No one could agree on whether the dress was black and blue, or gold and white. It suddenly made us all aware that we don't see things the same way. As author Anais Nin wrote, "We don't see things as they are. We see things as we are."

Sometimes things happen that change how we see and believe everything—we fall in love, we get seriously ill or close to death, we meet someone who thinks in ways we would never have imagined. When that happens we can never be the same. The resurrection is one of those events—if we can only believe it.

In today's reading three people all saw different things in this same event. And what they saw affected them and their faith dramatically. Although they all came to see the same thing, it was a different experience for each of them. But, once they had all seen the truth of this moment, it changed the world.

How do you see the world? Yourself? God? What is possible? Well, today we are invited to see the impossible—and it could just change how you see and live in the world from now on!



Seeing But Not Seeing

Sometimes we don't really understand what we're seeing. I remember going to the Cape Town Waterfront a few years ago. I saw an amazing bronze statue. It was a man, with such detailed facial features it was breath taking. He was in a suit with a hat on, and caught in the act of walking. The life and movement in the statue was incredible. But then, as I stood admiring this statue, someone came up and put a coin into the tin at its feet, and to my surprise the statue started moving! And then suddenly I realised that I wasn't looking at a statue, but at a real man, covered in bronze paint, and standing so still as to look like a statue!

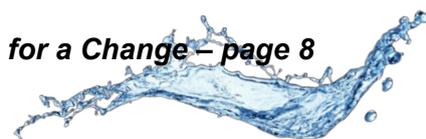
In today's reading, there are just nine verses. But there are six different words related to seeing. But not all the words are the same. There are two kinds of seeing in this passage—there is 'observing' and then there is 'understanding'. Peter arrives at the tomb and sees nothing but the grave and the clothes. He observes, but it changes nothing for him. He is filled with guilt for denying Jesus and his guilt remains. Mary comes to the tomb and sees only the stone and that the body has been taken. She observes, but it does nothing for her—her grief remains. Both Peter and Mary observe, but they don't understand. They are so obsessed with what they can actually see, that they fail to see what's really important.

When we are unable to see resurrection, we are stuck with only what we can see and touch and feel in our ordinary world. We observe life, but we miss the powerful, transforming creative force that flows through it all. We may even become obsessed with what we can see—buildings, people, money, events, ourselves. Or, like Mary and Peter, we may be obsessed with what we feel—our grief, guilt, regret, pleasure, security, power.

Even once Peter and John had gone home again, Mary stayed at the tomb. She couldn't break free. It was all she had left of Jesus, and she couldn't let go of what she could see. But, it was not life-giving. Where are you so caught up in 'reality' that you can't see resurrection? Where are the tombs more real to you than the One who has risen out of them? And what impact does this have on how you live and relate? Is it life-giving or death-bringing?

Seeing And Seeing

But there's another way of seeing—and it's not done with the eyes, but with the heart. It's what we call insight or understanding. We are told that when John got to the tomb his experience was very different from that of Mary or Peter. He didn't just see a stone, or a grave, or grave clothes. He saw what should have been there but wasn't—Jesus. He saw what Jesus had been telling his disciples for a long time.



When Peter went home he wondered what had happened (Luke 24:12). But John saw and believed! For Peter the world was exactly the same. For John it was completely different. It took Peter at least another week for his world to change the same way. For Mary it was just a few minutes until she met the risen Jesus and then she saw what John saw. This new seeing that John experienced changed everything—suddenly death no longer defined the world for him. Life did.

We don't know why John saw differently from Peter and Mary, but we do know that we need to see the way he did. We need to learn to look beyond the grief, guilt, death, and tombs in our lives and see resurrection—that life of God that is always breaking out in secret places. What would it take today for us to look beyond the 'realities' of our lives? Don't trust your eyes—the dress shows why! Trust your heart and you'll discover that resurrection is always there for those who seek it.

There's a wonderful paraphrase of John Wesley's journal that describes what it was like when he started preaching in the open:

Sunday, A.M., May 5: Preached in St. Anne's. Was asked not to come back anymore.

Sunday, P.M., May 5: Preached in St. John's. Deacons said "Get out and stay out."

Sunday, A.M., May 12: Preached in St. Jude's. Can't go back there, either.

Sunday, A.M., May 19: Preached in St. Somebody Else's. Deacons called special meeting and said I couldn't return.

Sunday, P.M., May 19: Preached on street. Kicked off street.

Sunday, A.M., May 26: Preached in meadow. Chased out of meadow as bull was turned loose during service.

Sunday, A.M., June 2: Preached out at the edge of town. Kicked off the highway.

Sunday, P.M., June 2: Afternoon, preached in a pasture. 10 000 people came out to hear me.

Clearly Wesley could only have continued to do this because somehow he saw and believed in the little signs of resurrection that must have been present.

Living What We See

At the heart of Jesus' way is a simple but incredible truth—resurrection. If we can learn to see it and believe in it nothing can destroy us. We know life is eternal and we receive it and share it. We watch for signs of life everywhere. But, if we can't see it, we live in death's shadow—even if we claim to be people of faith. We end up clinging to lesser things that give comfort, power, or strokes to our egos.

Faith in resurrection is not about what we sing, or pray, or read, or say. It is shown by how we live—as those who see the possible in the impossible. And who, in the



midst of whatever little deaths life throws at us, know that life is at work. And life is much, much greater!

RESPONDING

Response Ritual

Invite the people into a moment of meditation and stillness. Allow time for them to centre themselves. It may help for them to close their eyes and deepen their breathing. After a few moments of silence, invite everyone to focus on the air being drawn in and blown out of their bodies. Let them feel their body receiving life from the air they breathe. Encourage them to feel their heart beat and be aware of the blood pulsing through their veins. Let them feel their muscles and how they expand and contracting as we move. Give a few moments for everyone to become deeply aware of the Life that is at work within them.

Then invite them to turn their focus outward. Encourage them to listen for sounds of birds, insects, and animals, and of wind, or water. Give them a few moments to become aware of all the life that is happening outside of the space where they are.

Finally invite everyone into a moment of silent thanksgiving for the Life that fills the universe. When you are ready feel free to move into the following prayer.

Prayer of Request

We have seen it and can no longer doubt it:

Life breaks out throughout the universe;
death cannot quench it,
fear cannot suppress it,
and evil cannot corrupt it.

We give thanks for irrepressible resurrection Life!

And so now, convinced of the power of Life, we pray:

Wherever corruption, injustice, and power imbalances
rob people of abundant life,
May Life break out!

Wherever violence, conflict, and fear
stop people from living fully and freely,
May Life break out!

Wherever sickness, trauma, and death
make Life seem unbearable and fragile,
May Life break out!



*On this day when we celebrate resurrection
we commit to opening our eyes to see
everywhere that Life is breaking out among us,
we commit to opening our hearts to experience
all the ways that Life fills our world,
and we commit to giving our whole selves
to nurture and share Life in any way we can.*

Amen.

INTEGRATING

Ritual to Carry into the Week

As the service is brought to a close, you may want to invite the people to repeat the Life meditation each day as a way to expand their awareness of how Life is at work within them and around them.

Sending

The leader sends the people out into the rest of the week with the following words:

Go in the power of resurrection to live fully and freely and to share Life with everyone you can.

Amen.

