

Easter 2020 - COVID-19

(It wasn't) supposed to be this way. The women could not get the image out of their heads. Jesus being taken from the **(cross,)** just as the sun was setting. Beaten, bloody, lifeless, gone. It wasn't supposed to be this way. Just last week **(he had)** been joking about who could receive God's grace. He'd point at people in the market place....crooks, thieves, prostitutes, tax collectors, children, youth with no respect for anyone but themselves...how about her? Or him? Or them? Who can receive God's mercy? And no matter what they said....no, not her....Jesus would tilt his head and smile that broad grin, and say "if God can love the likes of you...why not them, too?" He was amazing like that. **(He'd)** even point out a priest, or one of the Pharisees who were so clearly off the tracks.....and when we expected him to draw the line against them...he'd surprise us with that word of welcome.

To be honest, sometimes Jesus would make us crazy when we'd think we had him stumped....and he'd play the grace card, and boom our argument was over. Oh, **(and he)** would laugh, and tell us how badly we didn't get this whole forgiveness thing....but not to worry, for God's mercy upon us is complete. I have to say he left us scratching our heads more than a couple of times. But, it wasn't supposed to be this way.

And you know, it was kind of odd....that when he **(would)** point out a priest or Pharisee in the marketplace...and we'd say "no way, dude" he would say they needed to be commended for the depth of their faith, even though it was foolishly placed..... But, it was **(those)** guys who seemed so pleased when he was dying on that cross. They smiled and laughed, slapping each

other on the back like they'd won a close election. Did they hear Jesus when he **(said,)** "Father forgive them, for they know not what they are doing." I think he was talking about them. They didn't get it, and I doubt that they ever will.....but Jesus would say.....they get grace, if I get grace.

You know, **(grace)** isn't even something those guys know about. It isn't. Their whole belief is built on pointing out how people mess up. They are impossible. **(I have)** a friend who made a really bad choice at a party like 8 years ago....she did some pretty outrageous stuff with the help of a lot of wine....and still, 8 years later those guys ask her if she's **(still doing)** that. And I know it's not supposed to be that way!

No, it wasn't, and this is why. If you want an **(easy)** religion to follow, always choose legalism. It's so simple. Break the law, go to jail. Simple. Break God's law go to hell. Simple. Right? Guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty! **(But,)** Jesus never said that, or treated people that way!

So, **(what made)** the darkness so heavy upon the two Mary's as they made their way to Jesus' grave was the idea that the legalists had won, and the mercy that Jesus had taught was lost. With every step they took, two words thundered upon their **(hearts:)** no mercy!

Can you imagine? Deep grief and sadness, the loss of hope, darkness claiming victory woven with fear....can you imagine the women's walk that morning?

To that darkness add an earthquake rumbling all of creation, and my guess is their fear was through the roof. I wonder if they wanted to turn back? Would you? But, they persisted.

At the tomb, **(despite)** the silence of pre-dawn darkness....the tomb stood neither closed nor silent. The stone had been rolled aside...and from within the grave came God's answer to this legalistic world: **(YES!)**

For months prior, the Pharisees and **(priests)** had shouted NO at the upstart preacher from Nazareth. For months despite their most devious efforts, **(people)** presented themselves at the Temple in Jerusalem, looking to re-enter the house of God. See, those people had been blind, and lame, and deaf, and worse. **(The)** legalists said "You are not welcome here, sinner!"

But **(Jesus)**, welcomed even the worst, and he healed them by forgiving their sins. His mercy, his forgiveness was given just like the prophet Jeremiah had written 600 years before...."**(I have)** loved you with an everlasting love, with an unfailing love I have invited you to come to me." And when the leper, now healed, presented himself at the Temple....the priests had to re-admit them, forgiven and healed. Jesus whispered that **(one word):** Yes!

If in your life you have ever **(come)** to a dead end; or you've hit rock bottom, or all of your dreams have faded, or all your hard work is dismissed, you are familiar with how loud the No's can be. They can thunder upon our hearts. NO!

(But), did you hear what filled the empty tomb this morning? **(YES!)** God's yes comes to us in grace and mercy. God's yes echoes every Sunday here, as we are reminded, every Sunday, that NO could not keep the power of Jesus' love down. Can you imagine meeting Jesus, alive, on that

road with the Mary's? Can you imagine the volume of the YES that burst in their broken hearts and hopeless soul? Can you?

I ask that because as our world continues its slide into a strange legalism where NO is given both economic and political favor.....we can easily go there, too. Legalism is always easier.

But....Easter invites us into God's resounding YES! Yes to life. Yes to grace. Yes to forgiveness. And when the legalists **(shout)** back with their darkness and those NO's....you need to push back the dark.

(Light) and life have come to us! That's how it was always supposed to be.

(Yes,and yes,) and yes, and yes, and yes... Love and love and love and love and love. Blessed Easter to each of you...Amen.