

## EASTER

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Easter was when Hope in person surprised the whole world  
by coming forward from the future into the present.<sup>1</sup>  
N.T. Wright

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Easter, or Eastertide, in its fullness, is the period of fifty days from Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday. Although it is populated by various sub-feasts, including the Feast of the Ascension, the Church celebrates the entirety of the Easter season as a single joyful feast, the “Great Lord’s Day” whose meaning is contained within the bookends of Christ’s resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit. In the resurrection of Jesus, we perceive what could be considered the *big bang* of God’s new creation exploding, as it were, as a renewing, recreating power in the midst of the old. In the coming of the Holy Spirit, God’s new creation continues to emerge in the Church. The Church is given to a despairing world to bear witness to that which has already begun, a process in which others may joyfully participate and which even death cannot destroy.

The mystery and meaning of Easter are far beyond my understanding. In preparing to write something meaningful for these pages, I sat for hours trying to comprehend what my spirit only dimly apprehends. But as I’ve pored over the story, a few details have leaped off the page. I offer them here knowing that this is a mystery *much too wonderful for me*.

The first is the redemption of materiality implied by the resurrection of Jesus. On that first Easter morning, when Mary Magdalene and the other women of Jesus’ inner circle went to tend to the body of Jesus, they were astonished to find it gone (John 20:1, 2). Those who have believed that the good news of the Gospel is the promise of escape from the body to an immaterial (spiritual) existence need to re-examine this story. For, in resurrecting the Son from death, God the Father did not discard Jesus’ material body, but recreated from the old something marvellously new; something incorruptible over which death will have no sway, but which is material nonetheless.

Think about the implications of this for a minute, because the good news that Christianity outrageously proclaims, and what N.T. Wright has summarized so eloquently, is that “what the creator God has done in Jesus Christ, and supremely in his resurrection, is what he intends to do for the entire world – meaning, by *world*, the entire cosmos with all its history.”<sup>2</sup>

Wright admits that attempting to say anything about the future is like erecting a signpost pointing into a fog. However, in Jesus, God’s future comes to us out of the fog, and we catch a glimmer of the glory that God has intended for creation all along:

The world is beautiful not just because it hauntingly reminds us of its creator but also because it is pointing forward: it is designed to be filled, flooded, drenched in God, as the chalice is

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<sup>1</sup> N.T. Wright. *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. (HarperOne, 2008), 26.

<sup>2</sup> Wright. *Surprised by Hope*, 91.

beautiful not least because of what we know it is designed to contain or as a violin is beautiful not least because we know the music of which it is capable.<sup>3</sup>

The glory of God's good creation is a glory that sin has obscured but that will be restored in God's new creation, of which Jesus is the "first-fruits" (1 Corinthians 15:20). Therefore, it is good and right that we reverence now what God has no intention of abandoning.

Another feature of the story that leaped out at me has to do with the redemption of history implied by the resurrection. When the risen Christ first appears to the disciples, they are afraid they have seen a ghost – until Jesus shows them his hands and his side (the wounds of his pre-resurrected life), at which point they are suddenly "overjoyed" (John 20:20). Upon reflection, what is evident in this detail is that God's redemption includes history as much as materiality. If what God has done in Jesus is what he intends to do for us, then our histories as well as our bodily lives will be redeemed and carried forward in God's new creation. Our life experiences won't be forgotten in a meaningless and regrettable past: rather, once transformed and fulfilled, they will become building blocks of the new creation. The wounds of Christ, evident in his resurrected body, suggest that the trials of our lives will be wondrously redeemed in the eternity of things.

But if it be true that God can redeem our cruelties and sorrows, then how much more can he do with our loving acts of neighbourliness and creativity? What we lovingly do now – the songs we compose, the gardens we plant, the tools we design, the relationships we forge, our acts of neighbourliness, mercy and justice, imperfect as they are – becomes the building blocks of God's new creation. Our creative labours and loving attention to others are eternally significant. They derive their energy and sustenance not from the pleasure such acts give us now, but from eternity itself (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Another observation about what centuries of observations have not yet exhausted: Our faith teaches that Jesus is not only the first-fruits and signifier of the new creation, but that he is also its Lord (Colossians 1:15-20). This may arouse consternation in some, as our present age is increasingly wary of rulers and overlords who, in line with a long history of pharaohs, caesars, kings, queens, presidents and prime ministers, use and abuse positions of authority to fortify their egos, personal wealth and power at the expense of others. Some leaders wreak polarization and upheaval. In almost all cases, the leader's character was on full display before their election to office. No one need be surprised by how things unfold.

I mention this to make a parallel point. The character of the future reign of Christ, already inaugurated in his resurrection, need not be a matter of speculation (a signpost pointing into a fog), because the character of the risen Christ and Lord of God's new creation was also on full display in his pre-resurrection life. Because of this, a good activity for the Easter season might be to read the Gospels, taking note of Jesus' actions, teachings and associations, and paying attention to phrases like "the least of these." Decide for yourself if the reign of Christ is cause enough for Easter hope and joy.

Finally, if Jesus really is God's future-arrived-in-the-present, then those who believe might hear the spirit of Christ inviting and empowering us to collaborate with him in transforming the present in light of God's future already among us.

WAS IT A MORNING LIKE THIS

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<sup>3</sup> Wright. *Surprised by Hope*, 102.

*music and lyrics by Jim Croegaert*

Was it a morning like this?  
When the Son still hid from Jerusalem  
And Mary rose from her bed  
To tend to the Lord she thought was dead

Was it a morning like this?  
When Mary walked down from Jerusalem  
And two angels stood at the tomb  
Bearers of news she would hear soon

Did the grass sing?  
Did the earth rejoice to feel You again?  
Over and over like a trumpet underground  
Did the earth seem to pound, "He is risen!"  
Over and over in a never-ending round  
"He is risen, hallelujah, hallelujah!"

Was it a morning like this?  
When Peter and John ran from Jerusalem  
And as they raced towards the tomb  
Beneath their feet was there a tune?

Did the grass sing?  
Did the earth rejoice to feel You again?  
Over and over like a trumpet underground  
Did the earth seem to pound, "He is risen!"  
Over and over in a never-ending round  
"He is risen, hallelujah, hallelujah!"

*Listen to the above song at [www.pilgrimyear.com/songs](http://www.pilgrimyear.com/songs): Easter: Chapter One.*