

“On The Way” Lent and Holy Week Series  
EASTER SUNDAY

“Awakening to Mystery”  
(Luke 24:1-12)

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## Scripture

Luke 24:1-12. New International Version (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. <sup>2</sup> They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. <sup>5</sup> In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup> He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: <sup>7</sup> ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ”<sup>8</sup> Then they remembered his words. <sup>9</sup> When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. <sup>10</sup> It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup> But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. <sup>12</sup> Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

## Introduction

1. “El Camino de Santiago” is Spanish for “The Way of St. James.”<sup>1</sup> Christian tradition claims that James, one of the first disciples of Jesus and brother to John who wrote the fourth gospel biography of Jesus, was considered the first apostle to be killed for his faith.<sup>2</sup> After James was martyred, it is told, his body was brought by ship to northern Spain where pilgrims traversed 496 miles across land to bury James in what is now called the city of Santiago de Compostela. Beginning as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> century, thousands of people every year, and today hundreds of thousands of people every year, walk, bike, and ride horseback on the pilgrim route for reasons ranging from spiritual awakening to experiencing the history and beauty of northern Spain.

One travel journalist notes that historically, modestly dressed pilgrims walk the path without high tech hiking gear and it is tradition for villagers to welcome travelers long the entire route. And, most consider the El Camino “a great leveler, as humility and compassion grow with each pilgrim. Blisters can fell a former marathon runner, while a demure 70-year-old hikes past blister free—for the moment. Everyone cares for, encourages and supports each other along the way. Strong international friendships bloom.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.goworldtravel.com/travel-way-st-james-el-camino-de-santiago-spain/> AND [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camino\\_de\\_Santiago](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camino_de_Santiago) (accessed 4-14-17)

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James,\\_son\\_of\\_Zebedee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James,_son_of_Zebedee) (accessed 4-14-17)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.goworldtravel.com/travel-way-st-james-el-camino-de-santiago-spain/2/> (accessed 4-14-17)

2. I share this on Easter Sunday because we have spent this year's Lenten season and Holy Week framing our special worship services as being "On the Way" with Jesus. We have explored the gospel biographies with the ups and downs of Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem—all for the purpose of being more awake to similar kinds of lessons, interruptions, and learnings in the pilgrimage of our day to day lives. The beauty and curiosity of our artists work and reflection on such things as "The Conference of the Birds" points out that for something as monumental as Holy Week to be useful, it must be framed as relevant to every aspect and season of our lives ranging from lessons in love and wisdom to the more difficult matters of dualisms and fear of death.

This is important to remember because in the life of Jesus, Holy Week was a final leg of the pilgrimage of *Jesus'* life and ministry. His teaching and healing ministry spanned three years and engaged said themes and more in that alongside wisdom teachings and miracles Jesus turned all religious practices on end and reframed how we understand others, even those who we consider our enemy.<sup>4</sup> Jesus clarified that true love includes embrace of our neighbor regardless of culture or creed, and that laying down one's life for another is the greatest expression of love the cosmos over.<sup>5</sup>

3. Yet, how do we apply such profundities to our day to day life and what does Easter Sunday have to do with the Monday after Easter? You know, tomorrow, when we return to school, jobs, and highly routinized life. Or, how does Easter help us with any number of struggles? The notion of God conquering death can feel quite abstract in the face of opposition or a crumbling marriage, or someone we love having cancer, or the hole in our heart because of a dear friend recently passed away. And, then there is the stomach ache that returns every time the topic of American politics is raised. How does the Easter resurrection help with that?!
4. Well, if we can think of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as both a profound mystery that reordered the human experience *and* a new patterned way to life a joyful life of love, Easter can become more than just an annual event of songs and sermons. *Easter, at its best, is center point to lifelong pilgrimage.* And, in the spirit of the first Christ followers on roads near Jerusalem, and all people who traverse such roads as the El Camino de Santiago alongside others; we are invited to go on our pilgrimages together through good and bad experiences, while encouraging one another, stopping for meals, serving strangers with hospitality, and perhaps most important of all--seeing and accepting one another across many cultures, young or old, poor or rich, straight or LGBTQ, able or disabled, and yes, seeing even Republican, Democrat or Independent, as equal sojourners on the path of life.

## A. Easter as Center Point and Christ Pattern as New Way to Love

1. If life is a pilgrimage and Easter is the center point for Christ followers, it is imperative that the *meaning* of Easter frame our pilgrimage. On one level the first Easter was the epicenter of God's redefinition of the human experience. People and religions before Christ related to God largely on the basis of codes and merit systems. And in regards to sin and the problem of evil the practice of scapegoating and blood sacrifice was used often.

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 5.

<sup>5</sup> John 15:12-13.

One of the Creator's intent behind Jesus' death and resurrection was that the human experience would be reoriented for all time to reject scapegoating and blame in favor of grace through faith. And with the intent of sustained relationship between people and God on the basis of faith, hope, and love, with the greatest being love.<sup>6</sup> And, it is love that is most important because in Jesus the holy ground of unmerited favor reframes that which goes wrong in our lives not as points for accusation, but as fertile soil for our deepest invitations and transformations.

Talk about a reset. And, a whole new way to see ourselves and the world around us. Easter, on one level, is about freeing ourselves from faulty thinking and harmful religion to love and be loved.

2. On another level the first Easter offers us a very practical patterned way to live a joyful life of love. What I am referring to is called the "Christ pattern" which is:

- Loving others even at the cost of suffering alongside them...
- Accepting that the cost may be as high as experiencing loss and death of different kinds...
- Yet, always being resurrected to a new way of seeing and loving more freely...

The first Holy Week frames this pattern up beautifully. The events of Palm Sunday were a profound signal that God's method for dealing with suffering and evil in the realm of the human experience wasn't going to be a stereotypical scene of dominative victory like the end of an action movie where the evil character gets what they had coming. Jesus didn't enter Jerusalem and dethrone kings or emperors to become some kind of new ruler of nations. Jesus entered Jerusalem not wearing regalia and on a war horse, but dressed as a rabbi on a donkey. He was a wounded healer taking on the form of a servant.<sup>7</sup>

As was read in today's resurrection Scripture where divine messengers reminded the first followers of Jesus' words, this *shouldn't* have been a surprise to his followers because over and over again Jesus signaled that he was not going to Jerusalem to take over a government or the world, he was going to Jerusalem with a surrendered heart to absorb the world's blow so that God's *love* could take over the world. And, that is exactly what happened. And, Jesus modelled the Christ pattern to the "nth" degree: He loved others at the cost of suffering alongside them. And, he loved even in loss and death.

Jesus did not strike back when struck, he said his peace and embodied his truth without stridently fighting his way through the courts. And, when Jesus' truth was rejected and his opponents threw him into the violent Roman crucifixion machine, right before he died Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."<sup>8</sup> Not a mic drop, if you think about it! And, yet right after that his final words were the mic drop of all time: "It. Is. Finished."<sup>9</sup>

3. Suffering love. Undying love. And, then resurrected love. Christian author Cynthia Bourgeault writes:

"It begins right there at the foot of the cross, heralded by a new quality of presence already caught by [a] centurion in his hushed exclamation, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" In that

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 13.

<sup>7</sup> Philippians 2:1-11.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 23:34.

<sup>9</sup> John 19:30.

moment of Jesus' death, the innermost essence of divine love was released into the planet as a palpable force that continues to make its energetic presence directly known."<sup>10</sup>

4. From that moment on, the Creator of all things put a new defining pattern of true love into our world that both changes the world and gives us the tools for transforming human consciousness over the long arch of time:
  - Loving others even at the cost of suffering alongside them...
  - Accepting that the cost may be as high as experiencing loss and death...
  - Being resurrected to a new way of seeing and loving...

That is a wholly original pattern, designed by God alongside the origins of time itself, and yet largely not known to human consciousness 2,000 years ago. And, today, in many ways, a pattern that still seems hidden even in Christian religion.

## B. Awakening to the Mystery of the Christ Pattern in Everyday Life

1. This is why we celebrate Easter, to re-awaken ourselves to the Christ pattern. Just as the first followers of Christ lived much of their lives with Jesus, and in the days after Jesus' resurrection confused and disoriented and only slowly awakened to who Jesus was and what it meant to live their lives in the Christ pattern, so must we accept that our false ego will initially largely reject the generosity of Christ and the cost of authentic love. It's just easier to follow the "power over" or ever popular "Jesus wins, so we're the best" Easter narrative rather than the "wounded healer servant to all" narrative.
2. For most of my life I was fed the "Jesus wins, so we're the best" Easter moniker. And, don't get me wrong. Jesus accomplished what he set out to do. In Christ, death lost its sting. And, the work of Jesus was to unleash a powerful love upon the earth, not a dominative power for Christian religion in general or some strange superiority for Christians in specific. Our faith calls us to love the basin and the towel of the last supper.<sup>11</sup> Our faith calls us to have enough courage to draw a line in the sand and calling out religious hypocrisy in ourselves and others who would seek to stone to death those who sin.<sup>12</sup> Our faith calls us to be our best as those who love others with empathy and identification in order to heal the world, not conquer it.
3. I confess. On some days I would rather win than serve. Seriously. I have a competitive side that just likes to win. My wife Holly kindly reminds me of this tendency pointing back to the first days of our marriage where we went to the YMCA to play a friendly game of racquetball, a game that she had never played before. We gently volleyed for several minutes and just as she was getting the hang of things it only seemed reasonable to ratchet things up a bit, right? Time to play this game for real---BAM! Kill shot!

I claimed that I was just trying to make her a better player. She didn't buy it. And, it has taken more life experience to soften my competitive edge and learn about the limits of winning. One life

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<sup>10</sup> Cynthia Bourgeault, The law of Three in Action. Imaginal Resolution. Center for Contemplation and Action Devotion. Tuesday, March 21, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> John 13.

<sup>12</sup> John 8.

experience that taught schooled me on the limits of winning and more about the way of humility, was my competing in a triathlon.

4. In 2004 a few friends and my wife Holly competed in a “Sprint Triathlon,” which is a half-mile swim, 14-mile bike ride, and a 3-mile run. I was inspired by those who competed and in particular my Holly, who was able to complete the race with a personal best time. We *all* were inspired because of what she said many times with her everlasting charm, “I may have finished last, but I was way ahead of everyone else who didn’t even try!” Booyah!



At the completion of Holly’s race, everyone challenged me to give it a try the next year, saying such things as, “It’s not about winning; it’s about finishing,” and “The beauty of triathlons is that there is a good chance that you are naturally given to at least one of the disciplines.”

I decided that I would compete in the next year’s race and, of course I thought that I could become awesome at *all* of the disciplines! I bought a book called, Triathlon 101<sup>13</sup> and charted out a six-month workout plan. And, I was quickly reminded why I was not a triathlete. I was a *terrible* swimmer who, even after swimming lessons, still sank. Running was not a great experience for me because I am nearly six foot four, and God has given me tree-trunk like legs. I don’t run; I rumble. I was decent at bike riding, but my aluminum hybrid bike weighed about fifty pounds more than most of the high tech carbon fiber road bikes that other triathletes used.

5. I had one training experience that is particularly burned in my memory. The race was called the “Lake Minnetonka Triathlon” which meant, of course, that the swimming leg would take place in Lake Minnetonka. One of my race coaches, Brenda, was emphatic that I swim a few times in Lake Minnetonka before the day of the race. It was a reasonable request, except for three things: First, I hate cold water. Second, Lake Minnetonka had ice on it until the second week in April. Third, the race was only seven weeks past the ice out date.

“Get a wetsuit,” I was advised. So, I borrowed a wetsuit, arranged a date for Brenda to canoe alongside me while I plunged into frigid, early May water. Not good. Remember, I was a poor swimmer as it was. (As an aside, I remember one day at the health club pool when I was feeling at my best, I felt that I had found a new gear in my swimming stroke, and was improving my time

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<sup>13</sup> John Mora, 1999. Human Kenetics Publisher.

swimming, “the front crawl”...until a person at least twenty years my elder passed me as if I were standing still...doing “the side stroke.” )

In the cold May Lake Minnetonka water I was having a worse than average day. Only fifty yards from the shore I sensed something was going very wrong. My wetsuit was getting heavy. I shouted out to Brenda in the canoe, “Something’s not right here...my suit is filling with water and making me heavier.” “Did you borrow the right kind of wetsuit?” she shouted back. “There is more than one kind?” I whimpered. Apparently, there is a scuba kind of wetsuit that holds water and a triathlon kind that repels water.

And then she said, “You better take that scuba suit off, or you are going to sink”. And, this is where I remind you to always wear something underneath a wet suit. You may be grateful. For me, it would have been awkward...and looked very bad had I not. “Hey kids, there’s Pastor Dan swimming in the buff in Lake Minnetonka.” I remember giving out a primal screaming as I wrestled my way out of the wet suit and cast the heavy wetsuit aside. “aaarrgh”!

6. The day I competed in the sprint triathlon in June of 2005 was a day I will remember for a long time. It was a microcosm of all of my six months of preparation and my best effort. I never did get better at swimming. Two subsequent waves of older aged athletes blasted past me in the water before I crawled onto the beach of Lake Minnetonka. I did pretty well on the bike, as expected. Running? Well, of course I tried to sprint the entire 3 miles and as I neared the end, my tree-trunk legs began to cramp and shout at me, “You aren’t going to make it, Dan!” Imagine the ridiculous scene of me trying to sprint, grabbing cups of water from hospitality people on the course, and constantly trying to rub my legs to keep them from cramping and collapsing.



It was charming to have my picture taken with my brother-in-law Dean, who blasted past me with a much older group of swimmers, shouting, “Swim faster, Collison!” In the end, the whole experience taught me a lot about myself *and* a lot about humility. It taught me about my limits and the limits of winning. And, even more it taught me about identification with others who do such courageous things, participation, and pilgrimage.

The idea of working across three disciplines and how challenging they were reminds of the challenge of the three points of the Christ pattern.

- Doing anything meaningful takes time and comes with a cost...
- The cost can sometimes be high...

- In the end, we are given a new way of seeing and loving...

Thankfully, and in light of the Christ pattern, I didn't experience death! But, I did come away with a new humility.

7. What about engaging some of the more serious topics of life such as what Jesus did when he ignored the cultural and religious norms of his time that excluded women and people with disability and disease from meaningful community? Human difference and diversity is the space where so much pain resides because it is where dominant social identities and narratives largely living in unknowing to their dominance, clash with minority narratives who are oppressed for the simple fact they are different in the createdness. Jesus lived in the crucibles of these spaces as he walked into camps of people with leprosy and disease. He planned trips such that he would have conversations with women, people of other faith traditions, and those deemed as outcasts because of physical difference. This is love that is willing to suffer alongside others.
8. The Christ pattern is so desperately needed in such spaces today as well. And, can be found! For instance, a meaningful dialogue has been taking place on twitter at #disabilityinchurch:



The whole conversation was started by this tweet:



“So, parents of kids with disabilities in the church: what do you wish good church people knew? I’ll re-tweet away.” And, the tweeting began:



- “I wish you hadn’t publicly prayed for my son to be healed of autism. In front of my son.”
- “I wish you believed that making church accessible to people with disabilities is basic human decency and not optional.”
- “When the Americans with Disabilities Act was being passed, churches and Christian schools fought hard to be exempt (and won).”
- “My Cerebral Palsy isn’t a result of sin or of a broken/lost world.”
- “On Good Friday remember Christ was beaten, impaired, and killed. On Easter he rose victorious, impaired, yet whole,”

17% of the world’s population experience disability of one kind or another,<sup>14</sup> and so much appropriate pain flows from that minority perspective. It was amazing to see how many people spoke to the need to change the church’s narrative. In the twitter feed there were some church leaders were paying close attention with tweets such as:



- “This thread is eye opening. Humbling. I’m thankful for your honesty. I truly had no concept.”
- “Tips/ideas for running a disability-friendly vacation Bible School?”

9. The Christ pattern is at work here in the space where difference collides with dominant identities. And, for those willing to follow love’s path into other differences such as racial or gender inequity, the church’s historically harmful relationship with LGBTQ persons, the suffering of refugees and resettled families from war torn countries, the challenging conversation about creation in the face of callous utilitarianism, it is guaranteed that we will feel suffering. And, it is likely that we will experience loss and deaths of many kinds as we uncover historically destructive narratives of unjust oppression, sometimes in the name of God and the Bible.

Christ followers do not go to such spaces alone, though. And, because of the resurrected Christ we are given assurance that those who suffer and experience loss and death for love, will be resurrected in God’s power with new standing and clearer vision. We will be more free to love, and more available to serve with abandon. The Easter mystery tells us this is how love works.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.who.int/topics/disabilities/en/> (accessed 2-4-17)

## Conclusion

I began discussing the El Camino de Santiago as one pilgrimage that people take to help them be more spiritually awakened in their lives. The odds that we will have the time, money, and physical well-being to take such a trip are slim. So, we might as well consider all that Easter gives us in the upper Midwest and find pilgrimage here! The resurrection reordered the human experience 2,000 years ago and clarified the Christ pattern as a new way to live a joyful life of love.

Christ arose to love. We can do the same.

Christ is Risen. He is Risen Indeed!

## Prayer

God of Creation and Resurrection, awaken us to the mysteries of Christ on every level that Christ is to change our lives. May our belief in the resurrected Lord change the way we see ourselves and all of reality. May we see Christ's pattern as our way of moving in the world such that the love of God changes us and rises in even the most surprising places.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

## Benediction

As our Easter celebration comes to a close and the new week begins, may we see the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as both a profound mystery reordering the human experience and a new patterned way to live a joyful life of love.

Amen! Go in peace.