

## EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF NH

*A message from the Right Reverend A. Robert Hirschfeld, Bishop of New Hampshire  
to the Episcopal Church of New Hampshire on Easter Day, April 9, 2023*

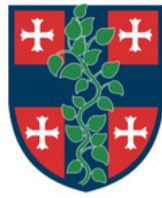
There is certain feeling about Easter morning that the gospels strain to describe. St. Matthew says that Mary Magdalene and another Mary are filled with both joy and great fear. In the tender scene described by John the Evangelist, Mary Magdalene seems confused, her eyes clouded in tears, until she hears the risen Jesus speak her name — “Mary” — then immediately in her joy she reaches out to hold Jesus. But He fends her off, saying, “Do not hold on to me.”

So, fear, terror even, mixed with joy, relief, exhilaration — that’s all part of this morning. There’s this sense of, “Come close, go away. See me, but don’t seek to close me in.” I think we are all, each of us, invited this season of Easter to recall and be aware of our own mixture of fear and joy whenever and wherever God’s love calls us into a new way of being. The gospels tell us, every year, that there is no such thing as a ho-hum, ordinary, or familiar Easter. Today our hearts are again quickened, which is the old word meaning to be made alive again, vibrant, and new.

Every year, indeed, every day, God makes a raid on death, on hatred, and on sin. And by sin, I mean anything and everything that attempts to draw us away from the love of God, from the love of neighbor, from the love of God’s creation, from the love of ourselves as children of God. The first witnesses of the Resurrection are given indescribable cause to delight and rejoice — after all, death, ridicule, shame, hatred no longer need threaten us, Alleluia! AND, at the same time, they are also left with an element of longing for even more. Even more.

Jesus keeps resisting being grabbed or confined, either by a grave, a cross, or our own limiting embrace. Jesus seems to be saying, “Keep looking, and in looking keep finding me” — even in Galilee, that back-country, the place in our own experience from where it is said that nothing good can come.

So, every day, every year, every Easter, every moment, can be a day and a moment of Easter surprise. Christ ever more rises again, showing what the Gospel says: the divine one is in our neighbor, the one who, like Jesus, bears wounds. Even the neighbor whose wounds lead to other wounds. Look for the risen Christ in the hungry, the thirsty, the forgotten, the imprisoned, the sick, the lonely, the ones who are overlooked, the despised and the rejected. Look for Jesus there.



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Look for joy where you would expect to find nothing but hatred or fear or despair. Look for signs of Earth's own resilient desire to be reborn when we begin tending it with the tenderness of a good gardener, like the one we meet in John's Gospel on Easter morning. Look for Jesus the Risen Christ in the person you have may have had a hand in rejecting, even insulting to the point of denying their dignity.

When the first witnesses of the Resurrection realize Jesus is risen, strangely, they don't get everything they hope for or wish for. They get much more: they get the longing, the quickening of heart, to reach out to Jesus in everyone, in every body, no matter who.

No wonder there is also some fear involved; the word the gospels use for fear is "phobia". And God seeks to melt away all our phobias into pure joy and freedom to serve and celebrate again, and again, and again. Every time we think we have pinned down a class of persons or a circle to love, banning all others, God insists to show us how yet another barrier, yet another limit to our love, is abolished on the Cross. On the Cross God's loving arms extend to all humankind, every language, every race, every gender, and age. And even the Earth itself longs to share in the restoration of all creation on this day. Just notice the role of the Earth and how it plays in the gospels announcing of the destruction of death.

And if that does not strike both terror and joy in our hearts, both confusion and clarity, both fear and amazement, awe and awkwardness, then perhaps our work this Easter morning is simply to pray for God to roll the stone away and out of our hearts, the heart of our church even, and from the heart of this whole broken world which God holds in his wounded and yet His living hands.

"He is not here", the angels say to us, "for he is risen."

Go, seek Him among the living, and come to know Him in the life God longs for you to live. Alleluia.