

What the Easter Bunny never told me....

I used to hunt for bright colored eggs hidden in our backyard and house. Under the gaze of the Easter bunny I celebrated the fertility of Spring, the yearly return of the sun, close enough now to melt the snow and quicken the seed and sap into glorious sprouting and flowering.

That's all I knew of this day as a child and not much more as an adult. The Easter Bunny never told me that this day, the first day of the week, Sunday...a miracle happened which would change my life completely, irrevocably, forever.

While the Easter Bunny was hopping through the springtime tulips almost 2,000 years ago, Mary Magdalene arose early in the morning with a mission. She was a woman who was once inhabited by inner demons who controlled her life and stole her happiness.

But on this morning that past life was totally gone, the demons departed at a word, and the sins of her past completely forgotten and forgiven...yet in her heart Mary bore a burden of pain unlike any other she had felt in her life. Her Lord and Teacher, her beloved Rabbi Yeshua, the one who had found, healed, loved, comforted and taught her, lay dead in a tomb.

While life blossomed all around her, the one who had given her new life, was shrouded in darkness, silenced by death. The one in whom she and the others who had the privilege to know him, travel with him, and witness all the acts of love and miraculous power and words of truth...the one she loved above all others was gone. Yet in death she would honor him. In her hand she carried a flask of embalming oils and spices that are traditionally applied to the body and shroud of the dead among the Jewish people.

The day he died she could not get near him. He was seized by the government who ruled her people, the Imperial Empire of Rome, and forced to carry a cross to a high hill where before all people he was nailed to that instrument of death and lifted up to hang in torturous agony until death freed him. And why was he so crucified, she thought, what was his crime? He claimed to be God's Son, sent by His Father, to save all people from the terrible consequence of sin, which is eternal death. He came to show the way back from separation into the intimate oneness with His Father, the oneness God so desires for us.

Even I, she thought, the worst of sinners, the lowest of the low, outcast and despised by all, you did not despise me Jesus...you loved me like no other. You forgave me all sins, you lifted me up to the highest place from the pit I was in, you welcomed me into the family of God from the exile of hopelessness. You did the same for everyone you met who would receive you.

For this they executed you like a common criminal? The only wrong you committed was to be righteous and sinless before God. That is a crime in this God-forsaken world, for

God has surely forsaken us when He allows His anointed savior to be killed and now lie in a darkened tomb.

These thoughts tormented Mary as she walked in darkness toward the tomb carved in a hill where the rich people are buried in Jerusalem. For after his death the Roman soldiers cut Jesus down from the cross and a man named Joseph of Arimathea, a secret believer in Jesus while he lived, stepped forth in his death and offered to bury the body in a fresh cut tomb.

This had to be done quickly before the Passover Sabbath the next day.

Every year for the past 1,500 years the Jewish people had celebrated their deliverance from Egypt at the hands of God, led by Moses from slavery to freedom. The Jews had marked their houses by the blood of a lamb so that the angel of death would pass over their house in Egypt sparing their first born. Instead the first born of every Egyptian family died and the Pharaoh finally let the million strong nation of slaves go free,

Before he died Moses told the people that in the future another prophet would arise from among them who would speak only what God told him and that they must follow everything he said. How ironic that Jesus who claimed to be the prophet Moses spoke of now lay dead at the request of the religious leaders of the Jews while they celebrated the Passover which foreshadowed and pointed to the future deliverer, called Messiah or Christ.

Even Mary knew these things for they were the common knowledge of a people who lived by God and for God. The Jewish people had no reason for existence except to live in the presence of the Living God who spoke to their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (who became Israel) and promised to bless all families of the earth through their future seed. Mary's heart was broken that morning to think that God had abandoned them to death, but her feet went onward down the path driven by a devotion and loyalty that she herself could not explain.

The Easter bunny was hopping on its way through the gardens of Jerusalem. Death is the way of life he says. See how the winter has turned to glorious spring! Yes I know fall will come again and then the darkness of the season of endings but I'll be hopping next year with a new spring in my step.

I still remember the intense delight I felt in finding an egg hidden in an unlikely place. The discovery was better than adding it to my basket and far better than eating a boiled egg later. What discovery could I have made that was like the discovery of Mary? For she was approaching the tomb now, the tomb guarded by Roman soldiers so that no one might steal the body of Jesus and claim some new miracle.

She could see the large silhouette of the rock that was rolled in front of this type of tomb in the pre-dawn shadows. But wait...next to the rock she saw a dark shape... it was the entrance to the tomb! The rock had been rolled away! The soldiers were asleep. Mary ran

to the entrance and inside saw... nothing. All of her pent up emotions came to head and overflowed in tears.

And then she heard a voice “ Why are you crying woman. Whom are you looking for?”
It was the kindly gardener. “O sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away”

And then she heard her name “Mary”

And the light came. Flooding her being like the dawn. The light of Jesus who she thought was gone returned in glorious love and warmth at the sound of her name “Mary”

Her eyes were opened and she saw that the gardener was the One whom she had been seeking, Jesus. “Rabbi” I thought you were gone. Overcome with gratitude, and wonder, and joy, Mary fell at the feet of Jesus to embrace His feet. “Don’t hold on to me yet Mary for I have not yet ascended to my Father. But go to my brothers and say to them “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”

Then He was gone and she was running, running like the wind, barely touching the ground at all, her heart singing “the Lord is Risen.”

One day many years after the bright colored eggs had disappeared and the Easter bunny’s hopping had faded from my mind I made a discovery. I went into the darkness of my soul to the same tomb. The rock had been there secure and huge, all of my life. My fate was sealed in the certainty of death and yet here I was on the first day of the week in the stillness of dawn.

I saw the rock. It was rolled away. I saw the entrance. It was dark and empty. I cried in my sorrow...what have I done, Lord, I have missed you and now you are gone from my life.

I heard the voice “Why are you crying”

“I have lost my way and can’t find my way home. I went looking for God and I can’t find Him”

And then I heard my name, “Bruce, why are you looking for the living among the dead?”

“My Lord is it you? Jesus Christ who I never knew?”

“Yes it is I, I live. Live with Me and never die.”

Now I am running like the wind, I am like a messenger of dawn with a heart full of joy and I say “Yes the Lord is Risen, He is Risen indeed.”

Bruce Campbell

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