

**TEXT: John 20.1-18**

**TOPIC: Early in the morning, Mary finds the emptied tomb; notifies the disciples; emerges from darkness.**

**SUBJECT: It isn't in the light that God makes the greatest impact on our lives; it's from the darkness.**

**TITLE: "While It Was Still Dark"**

"Early in the morning ... while it was still dark," Easter begins.

Easter begins in darkness with fear, shock, pain, immense grief, and uncertainty. Easter begins early in the morning ... while it was still dark.

Easter begins in a way we least expect ... early in the morning – while it was still dark.

I've experienced Easter when light and darkness dance together. For me, Easter begins when the dance between light and darkness reveals the emptiness of something that once was and illuminates what will be. Easter begins when the darkness of death is a shroud, and light rolls stones back. The Easter resurrection can be the darkness of scary childhoods and scary adulthoods blessed by the light of an abundant, graceful, loving God. Resurrection happens when people realize the good God can do with the really crappy stuff that happens. Like Easter, resurrection happens in darkness, so people – people like you and I – see an unexpected light shining on all God can do. Before we explore that, let's pray.

#### PRAYER

In order to understand the resurrection story in John's gospel, I think we need to go back to the beginning of John and let the first chapter make us uncomfortable.

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God."

The connection John makes with the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2, suggests something I think is easily overlooked. God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing or what, for us, would be complete darkness. In Jesus, John suggests Christ is that light that shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.

But let's take a moment to think about the darkness, OK? Think about what happens in the dark. As children, some of us might have been afraid of the dark; it's where the Boogie Monster is. The fear of the dark not only keeps children awake, it can keep adults awake, too, especially when darkness means finding ourselves walking through a valley of shadows or when we cannot see the complete, so we obsess over the incomplete.

It seems our earliest experiences of the dark make us comfortable with fear. As we grow older, we tell ourselves not to be vulnerable without realizing vulnerability makes for courage. So, we stay comfortable with our adult Boogie Monsters, unsettled, afraid, pained, traumatized, lost, and disappointed. Some of us fear giving up addictions because we think taking an honest look at ourselves will mean God won't love us or God will judge us into oblivion. When that happens, culture has influenced us more than scripture, and we end up believing in a punishing God rather than a loving God who is bigger than the gods that are too small.

Easter begins early in the morning, in a dance between darkness and light while it's still dark.

Too often, we can be like Peter and the disciple Jesus loved, racing to the tomb, not understanding that Easter begins in the darkness, so it's easy to walk away befuddled or strangely believing through a strange lens of unbelief.

Easter begins, when we linger in the garden, desolate and alone, like Mary does.

Easter begins when we let the darkness empty us of everything that isn't us because when we are emptied of what isn't authentic, there's more room for God to work.

Easter begins when light shines in the darkness and trust lights the way forward.

Easter begins when people let God transform their hearts and lives.

Easter begins when we realize God has healed us and given us the hope and courage to take that leap of faith.

Easter begins when people become willing to linger in those hard, cold, damp, darkened places where easy answers and half-truths are inadequate because only the truth sets you free.

So early in the morning ... while it was still dark, Easter begins even if we don't recognize Jesus because Jesus shows up in the least likely places among overlooked people.

Easter happens because we hear Jesus call our name. Easter happens when we don't try and hold onto our Lord and worship him, but when we do what he asks him and follow him.

Easter begins when we realize the darkness is a teacher to teach us who God is in relation to who we are, so we love God and ourselves more clearly, so we may also love our neighbors in ways we never thought we would or could.

Easter happens early in the morning ... while it was still dark ... for reasons God understands; ways God will have us understand in due time, ways which bring us hope.

Easter happens early in the morning ... while it was still dark ... so Easter may begin again and again and again – day after day, one day at a time.

Easter happens early in the morning ... while it's still dark. Be patient with it; give it time, and in time you'll understand. That's a promise; not my promise, but a promise of the One who was crucified and buried and then rose again; born from above.

Early in the morning ... while it's still dark ... Easter happens, so we may realize Christ's resurrection is an opportunity to hope – to experience our resurrections every day.

In the name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God in perfect community. Amen.