

## Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34-43 Ps. 118 Col. 3:1-4 Jn. 20:1-18

A sermon given by Pastor Elaine Hewes

St. Brendan Episcopal Church April 5, 2026

I begin with an odd sort of confession for a pastor to make... From the very first Sunday in Lent this year I wondered how I would be able to “preach Easter”...

No doubt some of my uncertainty about how to speak of the joy of Jesus’ resurrection has been a result of my husband Michael’s sudden death last July and the grief I still carry for that loss... But some of my uncertainty has also come from the state of our nation, fraught as it is with such animosity and injustice and fear, as well as from the state of our world, fraught as it is with such suffering and violence and war...

Knowing I would need some help to find a way to preach Easter this morning, I decided early in Lent to go down into my basement, into a small storage room that has no windows, and there, to look for help inside a large black trunk I’ve had for decades... A trunk I’ve used over the past thirty years or so to store a myriad of props and “show and tell” items that could help me speak of the things of faith in sermons and confirmation classes and Sunday School lessons...

- Like a container of mustard seeds to speak of the power of even the least little bit of faith...
- Or like a little clay bird that sings when filled with baptismal water...

- Or like the 15 kazoos with which to make a joyful noise...
- Or like the round red clown nose to speak of the folly of Jesus's life and death in a world that defines worth and meaning primarily in terms of privilege, power and prestige...

As I sorted through the many pieces of "show and tell" in my black trunk, in the dark storage room down in my basement, I found three things that have, over the past forty days of Lent, gradually given me a way into the Easter story (most especially the resurrection account from John's Gospel), and have helped me to find there something to say that is true to both the sorrows and fears many of us may be carrying this morning and to the astounding good news John the Gospel writer was trying to share with his early Christian community in the last decade of the first century, caught as they were in the grips of the Roman Empire and the catastrophes of their own day...

The first piece of show-and-tell being this photograph, a copy of which you have on the front of your bulletin this morning; a photograph taken some 25 years ago by Castine photographer Juliane Gardner as part of a series of 12 photos she put together to make a calendar called "Love Rocks"...

Each of the images in the series being a photograph of a heart-shaped rock found in some ordinary place in our little part of Maine... Some of those rocks being quite colorful, some of them being situated in summer flower gardens or in sparkling streams reflecting a beautiful blue sky overhead...

But the one I tucked away in my trunk, which hadn't seen the light of day for a very long time, (despite it being my favorite of Juliane's "Love Rocks" series) is this one... a figure that seems to rise in the ice and snow, with a heart-shaped rock at its center... as if to imply a melting of the frozen surroundings and a rising of love in the ice and the snow... rather like a snow angel might imply on a cold winter's day...

The thing is, this photo is very true to John's resurrection narrative in both plot and setting as Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb early on the first day of the week...

- John tells us it's still dark...
- Despite the hopes of many Jews that Jesus would overturn Rome and usher in God's kingdom of justice and peace, Jesus had been ridiculed and tortured and crucified just three days prior, and Rome was still very much in charge...
- Mary is distraught with grief, and when she sees the stone rolled away, she assumes that the authorities have taken Jesus' body, perhaps to prevent Jesus' followers from doing the same and declaring him risen from the dead...
- The disciples who come at Mary's request, find the tomb empty, and then, as John tells us, they just go home...
- When the risen Jesus appears to Mary, she doesn't recognize him until he calls her by name, and once she realizes it's Jesus and reaches out to touch him, he forbids her from holding onto him, speaking some esoteric words about ascending to the Father, and telling Mary to go tell the others that he is ascending to his father and their father, to his God and their God... Which Mary does, declaring to all the rest of the disciples, who were doing who-knows-what... sleeping perhaps,

or hiding in fear behind closed doors... Mary declaring, “I have seen the Lord.” End of John’s resurrection narrative...

Not really a sunny, bright, success-oriented Easter story if you ask me... with an easily-recognizable Jesus jumping out of the tomb with a three-part plan for overturning the Roman Empire...

But rather something more like this... (*show photo again*)... a hint in an ice-bound world of a love that once let loose cannot be long-held in tombs or graveyards or wintry landscapes, but rises in ways and places no one would ever expect or imagine...

A hint in the face of death of that door about which Wendell Berry speaks in his Christmas poem “Remembering that it happened once”... a door that once opened allows us to see the “other world” that is this one, the “other world” inside this one... where no construct of linear time separates us from God’s eternal love... but opens our eyes to see that love here, now, on earth as it is in heaven... still on the move, still rising, still liberating, still healing and reconciling, even as we await the fulness of God’s love to gather all things into love’s wide, wild, prodigal embrace...

Even as we stand in the ice and the snow... Even as we despair over the state of the world and so many things closer to home... Even as “our own frozen breath hangs in front of us”... Even then, despite everything, sensing something like

- the first warm wind of spring come sweeping across a North Dakota farm,
- the slightest greening of leaves,

- “the light a music in the air,”

inviting us... inviting anyone and everyone, here, there and everywhere, to be part of the “Despite Everything Club” ... *(which is the second piece of show-and-tell unearthed from my trunk)*...

The club whose one-and- only-purpose it is to lift heads and break open hearts to see, to hear, and to take into themselves the infinite Love of God, once made incarnate in Jesus and crucified by Rome, still on the move... the grave stone that had held him broken wide open and the cloths that had bound him rendered useless and cast aside...

Making Mary Magdalene, it seems to me, the first member of the “Despite Everything Club.”

In some ways this is the invitation extended to us on this Easter morning... The invitation to be part of the “Despite Everything Club,” so we too might have our eyes, ears and hearts open to see the risen Jesus in our midst, despite everything... This invitation implying that...

*Easter is a choice we make*

*Not to let Good Friday*

*Have the last word...*

*A decision we make to stand with Mary*

*In the garden on the first day of the week,*

*In the dark of early morning.*

*And to listen for the sound of Jesus*

*Calling our name.*

*A commitment we make  
to keep looking for signs  
Of love and light in the dark,  
Trusting that this love rises  
From the broken places,  
From the ashes, from the ice and snow  
In ways we would never expect...*

*And waking us up to see that  
Easter is a response we make  
To the love that rises  
In the devastations of our lives;  
A going forth, with Mary,  
from the garden into the world,  
handing out free membership cards  
to the "Despite everything club,"  
and all along the way,  
making snow angels in the snow.*

This call to go forth from the garden reminding us that as members of the Despite Everything Club, the Easter story intends to open our **eyes to see** and **our hearts to be** signs of the risen Jesus in the world...

Signs... like this little peace crane found in the bottom of my big black trunk with a few others in a similar state of disrepair... (*Show third piece of show-and-tell*)... Just a few peace cranes left over from a project we undertook at Redeemer Lutheran Church at the outset of the Iraq War... Inspired by the millions of peace cranes made by people around the world over the past 75 years in response to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we folded 1,000 peace cranes over many weeks, finally assembling them in long strings of concentric circles, one inside another, making a waterfall of colorful cranes which hung in the Redeemer narthex for a number of years, until one Easter when we decided that they needed to be set free to go out into the world...

And so, we cut them apart, and sent them out with people with the invitation to give them away as signs of peace and compassion... signs of love rising despite the seemingly endless madness of war... signs of Easter in a Good Friday world...

Which gave me the idea of doing the same this Easter morning... And so, about one week into Lent, I asked friends and family members to make peace cranes for our Easter tree... Those cranes flying into my mail box in Blue Hill over the last ten days or so from

- Corvallis, Oregon
- Madison, Wisconsin
- Chapel Hill, North Carolina
- Rockport, Massachusetts,

- Brunswick, Maine
- Bangor, Maine
- Stonington, Maine
- And some from Sedgwick and Penobscot, Maine, made by folks who stand on Main Street in Blue Hill on Thursday afternoons and Saturday mornings to bring attention to those who are suffering from the madness of war and injustice in our world today... Those folks saying they wanted to be part of our St. Brendan Easter Tree too...

So after worship, I invite you to come and take a peace crane from our tree, and to think of someone in your life who may need a sign of love's presence rising... of the love that moves in the ice and the snow... Someone to whom you might give this invitation to become a member of the "Despite Everything Club," with its insistence that by the power of God's love, Good Friday does not have the last word...

(My friend Alice Hildebrand gave me such a sign this past week when she sent me a poem about the bird watchers in Tehran who are still posting sightings of birds, even in the middle of war... At least as of day 17 into the war, as Alice wrote in her poem, someone named Parsa sighted twenty-eight Common Swifts, five Red-billed Choughs, and sixteen rooks...

It just feels to me like such a "despite everything" thing to do... To count birds and post their numbers even as bombs are falling all around... Alice's poem feeling a bit to me like a peace crane, or a snow angel in the snow... a sign of love's power and love's insistence to rise in the midst of death)...

So, after worship, I invite you take a peace crane with you to give to someone who may need a sign of the love that rises in the ice and the snow, the ashes and the dark... But here's the thing... For those of you who may need such a sign of this love yourself, I invite you to hold onto your crane for as long as you need to...

Because sometimes, like Mary, we just need to stay in the garden for a while... Sometimes we just need to stay there until we hear Jesus call our name... until we hear his words, first spoken to Mary, about the great constellation of love that holds us all... no between between Jesus and God, Jesus and us, God and us, you and me, us and the world out there... The love over which neither Kings or empires, hatred or vengeance, illness or death, have any lasting power...

Sometimes we just need to stay in the garden until we sense that the door is open... and love is rising... promising that it is from this love that we have come, and to this love we shall return... This love, that despite everything, is still moving in the dark with healing and hope and peace on its wings... and inviting us to go forth, with Mary,

*from the garden into the world,  
handing out free membership cards  
to the "Despite everything club"...  
all along the way,  
being open to both seeing and being  
signs of the risen Jesus in the world,  
and making snow angels in the snow.*