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April 4, 2021 Easter Lectionary “B”

YOUR PUNCTUATION OF EASTER

John 20:1-18 Colossians 3:1-4

Easter Sunday last year, we had just begun our COVID-19 pandemic shutdown and who knew that we'd go 28 weeks of recorded worship broadcast on Facebook and YouTube? We were at home last Easter watching worship on Television and laptop computers, drinking coffee and lounging on the sofa in our pajamas and robes or yoga pants and sweatshirts! Now we are gathered together in-person(!) to celebrate our joy in our Risen Lord and our joy of church family being together! I appreciate you being here, even though you pointed out that our pews don't recline like your La-Z-Boy at home!

We are here to celebrate Jesus Christ risen from the tomb, bringing us forgiveness and life everlasting!

Punctuate your reading. One of my seminary professors drilled into us the rubric for reading scripture: “Read the punctuation and punctuate your reading.” If the reading is joyful – show it in your lively voice! If the reading is hard...show...the...struggle...in...your...voice.... If it's questioning(?) lift your voice. If it's a demanding commandment, strike it with a PUNCTUATION mark! Use pauses.....for effect...to allow your listeners to wrestle with the verse. And celebrate with SPEED and excitement the joyous GOOD NEWS!

So how would you punctuate **your** reading of our Easter passages?

And on a greater note....(“pause for effect”) ...how would YOU(!)... *punctuate Easter*?????

In an Easter devotional years ago Joe LaMusio asked how you would describe Easter without using any words, using only punctuation marks. Which punctuation marks would you use to describe Easter for yourself this year? To paraphrase Joe:

- Maybe Easter is all joy and happy faces, so you punctuate with happy emojis!
- Maybe Easter is a comma for you, it makes you stop, pause, think, and listen, but that's about it.
- Perhaps today is a downer – a big, bold, **period**. You thought you'd feel excited, but instead it seems to be more like empty ritual. Maybe you're sad, or grieving or lonely, or just blah?
Maybe Easter felt like a period to his disciples. He was dead. He was buried. Their hopes were dead.

But wait! ...*What is this that these women are saying? ...The tomb is empty?*

The period is no longer a period...it's a question mark, and that's worse than a period. Now they are starting to doubt. Where is he? Who took his body? The guards are gone, the stone is rolled away. He's not there. If he's not there...**where?**

An angel speaks, “Why are you weeping (?) Whom are you looking for(?)”

“Why do you look for the living among the dead(?) He is not here, but has risen(!)

Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again(?)” (LK 24:5–7 NRSV).

Of course they remembered (!)

The periods are gone.

The question marks are removed.

There is one massive exclamation point(!)

Easter is an exclamation point of gratitude and of praise for the resurrection of Jesus Christ and for the salvation His victory over death brought to us! (LoMusio, in Swindoll, 172)

How is your life punctuated these days?

- If life is good and you are joyful, for what are you giving thanks?
- Are you facing question marks today? Are situations troubling you or challenging you?
- Are commas in your life causing you to pause and search your heart...or to ponder your life's direction?
- Are grief or sorrow making you stumble and start again?
- If you are stymied, stuck, exasperated, remember the phrase, “Don't put a period where God has placed a comma.” You are not done; you are not defeated; God's resurrection power is in you too!

Toward the end of her life as she penned her final love letter to her husband, George Burns, famed comedienne Gracie Allen wrote, “Never place a period where God has placed a comma.” Gracie learned that when things look bad, when we are facing a crisis, or have experienced a setback or even a defeat, we are prone to give up, to resign ourselves to defeat, or hopelessness. But in Ephesians 3:20, Scripture tells us that God is “able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think” God can do what we cannot. God can place a comma where we would place a period.

Colossians 3:1-4 tells us *So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, ...not on things that are on earth!*

As Christians we view things against the background of eternity – we know that this world is not all that matters. We have hope and a higher calling to goodness and when Christ returns, we too shall be revealed with him in his glory!

Nothing can defeat God's power in Jesus Christ! Not death, not despair, not sin, not Satan, nothing can defeat God! And the God who loves you has a plan for you! God is with you to deliver you! So when a crisis has you ready to throw in the towel, when you are feeling defeated or hopeless, don't look at your human limitations, look to God! Nothing is impossible for God and with God's help you can overcome anything! Don't place a period where God has placed a comma.

We don't win every battle our battles; things don't always work out the way we wish, defeats are real, but defeats do not mean we are failures! With Jesus in your life you gain dignity and purpose and meaning and hope! Easter happens over and over! New life breaks in.

New meaning comes! New aims, new goals, new directions, new understanding, newfound strength! All these come in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Haven't you learned that(?)...I ask(,) ...with pause for effect....! <grin>

Easter happens when the power of self-restraint renders violence impotent,
...when peace overpowers hatred,

... when arguments give way to solutions with respect and fairness,

...when concern replaces selfishness.

Easter happens whenever God's power replaces death and despair with life and hope!

Some civic-minded people decided to put up a fence around the town cemetery. When they asked one man for a contribution, he said "No Way!" When they asked why not, he replied "Who needs a fence around a cemetery? Those outside don't want to get IN, and those inside can't get OUT!"

There is one case, of course, where that's not true. On Easter morning the women and the disciples wanted to get IN the tomb but a stone, rather than a fence, blocked the entrance to the tomb of Jesus. The women wanted to anoint the body of Jesus for burial, to preserve his body – and they worried how they would get in past that great stone. And when they arrived, and when the disciples came, the stone was rolled aside. They got in and Jesus had gotten out!

Sometimes we put fences around certain areas of our lives to the extent that we're trapped and others can't get in to help us. And sometimes we want to help people we love, but they fence us out. They erect barricades to keep us out of their vulnerable spots. But sometimes fences can be removed, stones can be rolled away, and we can be released, and others can be released to us, so that we can enter wholesome relationships. It happens all the time, and when it does, Easter happens.

Sometimes Easter is delayed. Sometimes Easter requires that we make changes – a new relationship perhaps, or a new direction, a new place, a new home, new friends. But still Easter comes! Still life seeks to correct itself! Still comes the balance in life! God is still at work and joy comes in the morning!

Snowstorm: In March 1993, an unexpected snowstorm hit the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in East Tennessee and Western North Carolina. It was the snow of the century. King Duncan, a pastor in Knoxville, TN at the time, shared this account.

"Four medical doctors from Knoxville, TN had chosen that weekend for a hunting excursion in the Smokies. Since they had expected to be gone only one night and didn't expect any adverse circumstances, they didn't bother to give their families or their staffs the exact location of their hunt. They felt that their SUV could take them deep into the mountains and get them back out with no difficulty whatsoever.

"Imagine their surprise when the snow around their vehicle became so deep that their SUV refused to budge. What were they to do? No one had a cell phone coverage. No one in the outside world knew where the men were. They hadn't brought enough food for more than two days. They were frightened and bewildered as what to do next.

“At sundown on their second day of being stranded, they still had no contact with civilization. They divided a stale doughnut that someone found in the back of the vehicle. They were cold, hungry and anxious. Would no one find them before they had either frozen or starved? Then suddenly they heard a sound overhead--the unmistakable whir of a helicopter. They jumped out of their vehicle and screamed and waved their arms to allow the pilot of the helicopter to locate them. And he did. For a moment the helicopter hovered above them. They could see it was already filled with other hunters or hikers. Then they saw a basket being lowered from the helicopter. In that basket was a note. On that note was one word: "Tomorrow."

“Those four sophisticated medical doctors laughed when they admitted that they made a chorus line, kicked their legs as high as the snow would allow and began to sing at the top of their lungs, "Tomorrow," from the musical "Annie." "Tomorrow, tomorrow, I love you, tomorrow, you're only a day away." Their fear was gone. Help was on its way. They would live to see another day” (Hamilton, 2002).

Tomorrow. That would be a good song to add to our Easter repertoire. Tomorrow!
For that is the Easter message (EXCLAMATION POINT!)
Because Christ has conquered sin and death (comma), we can live resurrection lives now
(comma)
beginning right now (comma),
this moment (EXCLAMATION POINT!)
And have hope for Tomorrow and forever!

Jesus is alive. He is real! He is here, for you! Right now! Right here!
If you will accept Christ into your life and give your life to him, you can know the forgiveness,
the faith, the hope, the LOVE , the SALVATION that God wants to give you.

Jesus Christ is risen today! Easter is happening all over again!
Seize the day of victory and go forth in the miraculous power of God! ALLELUJAH! Amen!

Let us pray....

Almighty God you have revealed your love, your might, your power.
You have conquered death with life, and despair with hope.
Sinners that we are, we justly deserving your condemnation. But you choose to save us!
Jesus Christ is our salvation Thank you!.
Enter our hearts today, cleanse us, renew us, take control of our lives and
make us the persons you want us to be. that we may live anew in Jesus Christ risen today!
Amen!

Sources

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