

Easter – 2026
Exodus 14:10-15:1
1 Corinthians 15:1-11
John 20:1-18

“Toughen up, Buttercup!” Elementary age schoolboys can be pretty brutal to one another on the playground. I, of course, never engaged in such juvenile banter, but I’m familiar with it. “Pull up your big-boy pants Jimmy and put your back into it.” My best friend called me “Wilma.” I guess it was better than “Little Bo-Peep.” Boys, when I was growing up, were expected to be tough. In ancient times, the boys emulated the fictional characters Hercules or Achilles or Hector. My generation emulated the very non-fictional characters John Glenn, Joe Frazier, and Dick Butkus. Little girls were in the same boat. Expectations for them seemed to keep getting higher. Our young lasses were encouraged to be a combination of Rosie the Riveter and Farah Fawcett. I recall a commercial from my youth where a bombshell sang, “I can bring home the bacon, fry it up in a pan, and never, never let you forget you’re a man, cause I’m a woman.” The narrator then said: “Give her Enjoli, the eight-hour-perfume for your 24-hour woman.”

There’s nothing wrong with being tough, well-rounded, and competent across multiple domains. The Marine Corps’ unofficial motto is “improvise, adapt, and overcome.” I like it. We have standards. We strive. A pastor friend once told me that his mother, whenever he cleared a certain height in the high jump, would *immediately* raise the bar. He was speaking metaphorically. Man’s abilities to win the day come an abrupt end when facing death. Death is a dragon that man cannot slay. No Marine can improvise, adapt, and overcome the assault that death brings. Jimmy can’t pull up his big-boy pants, put his back into it and surmount death. On some level, man is afraid of death. Cryonics is the pseudo-science that death can be paused by liquid nitrogen, and the patient can take an ambulance to the future where medical fixes will be limitless. I once listened for an hour to a man detail how he devotes all his waking energy to living longer – diet, exercise, and way more – it was super extreme. On some level, he’s afraid.

What about us? Death savagely attacked the innocent Christ. He was sinless. Death would have no claim on the sinless Son of God. But Jesus is our substitute. Jesus stands in our place. Jesus is humanity reduced to one. The Lord Christ didn’t “roll up His sleeves” and actively assault death. No; the Messiah opened Himself up to death’s assault. His active obedience, Jesus’ perfect keeping of the law as the holy Son of the Father is different from His passive obedience, His compliant suffering of the wrath of God against the sin that we’ve committed. Jesus submits to death passively. Without making a defense, Jesus submits to crucifixion. Remarkable! The One who rules the Cosmos submits to the brutality of being nailed to a cross. Why? A Victory is in view. A Victory that the toughest among us could never achieve. Christ’s cross is a Victory without boundaries. Jesus had come with divine authority and He uses it. God’s authority; the Creator’s authority; Jesus’ righteousness is the tool, the instrument of Victory. Let these words ring in your ears: “... I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the authority to lay it down. I have the authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father” (John 10:17-18). How thoroughly has this victory invaded your mind? This victory is 100 percent in you – God’s Word, death and resurrection, in you. How much is it in your mind? How much is it in your everyday outlook?

The women were thinking only of death when they went to the tomb. All was gray. All was sorrow and loss and finite. Such love, though; such tenderness; the women were devoted to Christ even in death. But His Words had no grip in their minds. Death ruled now. Christ's voice was silent and, on this morning, with funeral spices in their hands, death ruled. There was no improvisation, no adaptation, no overcoming the menace that was unleashed on Good Friday. I've been there. You have too. World events, personal crisis, storms that rage without mercy – I've had my steps haunted by the finite, where all is gray. You have too. What beauty filled the eyes of Mary Magdalene? What divine glory, what divine love, what newfound purpose and strength gripped the heart of Mary? "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him" (John 20:15 NIV). Those were the last words of a woman who still made death man's master. "Mary." So said the One who is the resurrection the life. Mary. The sound of her name, spoken by the Risen Savior, pierced her finite world. Imagine the joy! Imagine the revelation! In a flash, she knew – death has no sting. My Lord is the Lord of all – ever and always and completely. He lives! My Lord and my God!

There is no joy like the joy in Christ's church. There is no purpose of life like unto that of Christ's disciples. There is no strength like ours, no courage like ours, no love like ours. We stand in the truth of the resurrection. We bury our loved ones in the truth of the resurrection. We raise our children to know what life awaits us after we die. We do not fear death. Not because we are tough but because Christ is risen and death has no sting. We are liberated from oppression. We are liberated from the misery that the fear of death brings. Alive! In the book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, Jesus says: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys to death and Hades" (Revelation 1:17-18). Remember Lazarus? Jesus went to Bethany to raise dead Lazarus. Jesus didn't go Bethany to merely offer consolation to Martha and Mary. Jesus said: "I AM the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). The Lord Christ *is* Easter. Just like at Bethany, Christ's authority is in this place. Resurrection is our heritage, our daily bread. Jesus raised Lazarus because that's what He uses His authority to do.

Some don't like it. To forgive the sins of the "unworthy," to claim to be the only true God, to say that no one comes unto the Father except through Him – some don't like it. "It's too exclusive," they say. So, unbelief attempts, by falsehoods, to undermine the resurrection. National Geographic once ran a cover story on how an archaeologist found Jesus' ossuary. An ossuary is a bone box. No; that is false. Some will promote the idea that the disciples stole the body of Jesus and then claimed the resurrection to start a cult. No; the disciples, all but John, suffered brutal martyrdom. They died knowing that the Lord was raised from the dead. Again, there is no courage like Christian courage. The unbelieving world doesn't like Easter and so they wrap it in bunnies and that crazy fake grass. Unbelief is like Sisyphus. Sisyphus is that ancient Greek mythical figure who is cursed to forever roll a rock uphill. He almost gets the rock to the top and then it rolls back down, forcing him to start all over again. Unbelief is trying everything in its power to defeat death, but it's futile on man's part. I read a story recently about Chinese barbarism that detailed the selling of human organs – state sanctioned, for profit, organ harvesting. The fear of death leads to very dark places.

We celebrate today. Life is abundant today. Christ is risen! Today, colors are imbued with newfound vibrancy. You sense it. Easter promises more than what any of us can fully comprehend. Sin was an enemy whose malice brought a fearsome toll. You have known the pain of guilt. Guilt is real. And Christ died. Your Savior took your sin, your guilt and paid the price. His suffering was real. Death snatched at Him. And death had to give Him up. Guilt was *atoned* for. Beneath our sin there was, in Jesus, a holiness so astounding that death was rendered powerless. This risen Savior is among us, with His Victory. He defends us. He ministers to us. He leads us through this life toward our heavenly destiny. Easter makes heaven our home. That's what we celebrate. Death has no claim on you, for sin is vanquished and Christ is risen. That's why we celebrate. It's *His* Victory. It's *His* power. His life has been given to you, and you belong to God. Death is a phantom, a powerless husk. Christ is risen. He strode out of His tomb, and we stride out into the world as those who belong to Christ. To Him be the glory forever and ever.