

# A Princess' Witness

Easter – April 4, 2021

Did you see Oprah's interview of Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, and her husband Prince Harry, a little less than a month ago? I'll admit, I didn't watch it the night it first aired. I didn't watch, in part, because it sounded like it was going to be just a bit of the uber-rich talking to the uber-richer, and my time could be better spent watching reruns of "Barney Miller" than listening to the British Monarchy being taken down once again by spilled tea in the colonies. Even the dozens of articles about the interview in the New York Times didn't motivate me to watch.

What did, was an article in, of all places, Elle magazine. What in the world could a glossy fashion magazine say that would change my mind about watching an interview between the beautiful and the beautiful-er people, and more importantly, what does that have to do with Easter?

To answer that question, we need to unpack what Easter means in our lives. Easter is, at its core, about grief, resurrection, and witness. Years ago, a beloved colleague of mine studied the experience of belief in Jesus in cultures all across the globe; specifically, how different cultures affected the practice of Christianity, what transcended culture, and what changed. One of the things that transcended, from industrialized cultures to very isolated communities, was that crucifixions were public and resurrections were private. What he meant by that is experiences of grief, devastation, death at the hands of oppressors, shame and humiliation, are very often public experiences. The death of a loved one, hitting rock bottom, losing a business, bankruptcy, divorce, all include an element of being public. Loss and pain and death, across cultures, tend to be things that we suffer amidst other people.

Think of Jesus' trial and crucifixion: He was paraded before the authorities and crowds, nailed to a cross, and then that cross was raised up for all to see. That was intentional on behalf of his executioners, who sought to publicly shame, humiliate, and demean Jesus. We know the death penalty isn't a deterrent, but the authorities thought that the humiliation and shame they wrought against Jesus would neuter his movement, dissolve the power of the community he was nurturing, diffuse their ideas that inherent dignity, mercy, compassion, and inclusion held supremacy over temple sacrifice, authoritarianism, and rule based religion that all too often diminished real lives, but kept folks under control.

AND, don't forget the other side of the equation that tends to be true across cultural experiences of Christianity: that resurrections tend to be private. The private nature of Mary's encounter of the risen Christ alone in the garden is echoed in each day of getting and staying sober; starting to feel again amidst an experience of depression; developing a healthy relationship with money after devastating losses; feeling anything but numb after the death of a spouse or parent or child; after a miscarriage; after a devastating break up; after any sort of trauma.

In order to grasp Easter's potential in our lives, we need to first recognize that all resurrections are predicated on an experience of grief. In the account of that first Easter Sunday from the Gospel of John which we read today, we hear four different times that Mary wept. Her grief pervades this story. Anyone who has experienced crucifixion, who has observed unnecessary loss wrought by oppression, who has experienced death and loss, who has experienced the devastation of the tomb, sees a kindred in Mary. She is broken by the experience of the loss of Jesus.

One of the takeaway lessons I see here is that coming to recognize the resurrections, the new birth in our lives, takes time. In Mary, we see someone amidst deep loss. At first, she's numb, weeping. Then she doesn't understand. We even hear her bargaining, engaging in one of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's classic stages of grief, when she says to the gardener, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

And so, depending on where we are in our relationships to the griefs of our lives, one way to access the promise of Easter may be to contemplate "our own times of not knowing and not seeing how life could ever come out of the death that surrounds us," (Mary Hinkle Shore on Working Preacher) to find solace in the fact that Mary and the other disciples were lost in utter devastation, despite the fact that the risen Christ was right there in their midst, and remind ourselves it often is similar with our "little resurrections," that new life is blossoming right under our noses, long before we perceive what is happening.

Karoline Lewis points out, Jesus' admonition, "'Do not hold on to me' (which is what we read in the NRSV translation of the Bible) is a closer translation and makes more sense than the King James Version's 'Do not touch me.'" Touching wouldn't hinder Jesus' ascending, but holding on would." Along with being a better translation, it's also better psychology and spirituality. "Holding on to what has been hinders new life. Glimpses of the old life give us comfort and energy for rebirth, but they're not to be grasped tightly." (Lewis, Working Preacher)

This year, especially since so much of our existence has been private and intimate, I'd like to suggest that our Easter project is to flip the notion that crucifixions are public and resurrections are private inside out, and make our resurrections more public, to follow Mary's lead and share the good news that the powers of death do not, in fact, have the last word.

You've all probably heard the old philosophical question, "If a tree falls in the wood and there is no one to hear it, does it make a sound?" On this Easter morning amidst pandemic, this Easter morning amidst a year in which so much of our living has been done in private, our question is, "If a resurrection happens and no one shares it, is it Easter?" Because of the way the structure of this Gospel is written, the reader knows who Jesus is before his contemporaries do, and this compels us to want to tell them who he is. It makes us want to tell the people in the story—this is Jesus! He is risen! Don't you get it? Death didn't win! This, my friends, is Easter—to experience grief, to recognize rebirth and new life, and then to want to share it.

So, finally, back to Meghan and Harry. First, the reason I even read the article was the title: "I Didn't Care About The Royal Family. Then There Was Meghan Markle." I took the bait, and was rewarded with this powerful paragraph:

"Contrary to what the (mostly white) talking heads on Twitter will tell you, Meghan Markle's plight is not 'irrelevant' to Americans, nor is it merely fueled by the glittery facade of celebrity. Last night's interview was about so much of what America itself has operated on for centuries: racism; misogynoir; toxic media; a fundamental disinterest and even distrust in mental health; a chokehold on the reins of systemic change."

Friends, after reading this article, what I saw in the Oprah interview is Easter witness. A young woman asked for help amidst a mental health crisis, and, unlike his family's response to a similar

request for help from his mother a generation before, this time the prince behaved like a gentleman, or maybe he behaved like a partner. He listened, he believed her, and he agreed to work with her to make their lives healthier, no matter what historical systems that would buck. THAT is resurrection. But even more, the interview, making it public, is Easter.

I asked earlier, if you keep your resurrection private, is it Easter? The answer, quite frankly, is no. What makes Easter Easter is Mary going and telling the disciples, “I have seen the LORD.” What makes Meghan’s experience an example of living an Easter life is the interview, it’s witness, it’s letting people know that new life is possible and we’re not beholden to the systems that held us in death. New life is possible, from beyond the tomb, and from within Windsor Palace.

In my message to you in our Good Friday “This Week at Union” email, I wrote about “descansos.” Descansos are the impromptu memorials people erect at the site of violence and death.

“Descansos are symbols that mark a death. Right there, right on that spot, someone’s journey in life halted unexpectedly. There has been a car accident, or someone was walking along the road and died of heat exhaustion, or a fight took place there. Something happened there that altered that person’s life and the lives of other persons forever.” (Clarissa Pinkola Estes)

In Latin America, they are the roadside shrines that mark the memory where an accident claimed a life. Metaphorically, we can also view them as crossroads, choice points, places where life went down one road and might have taken another. In her book “Women Who Run with the Wolves,” Clarissa Pinkola Estes encourages her readers to make a map of the descansos in their lives, to acknowledge and remember the wrong turns, lost opportunities, broken hearts, traumas and disappointments that you’ve experienced on your journey, with the intention that this practice will serve to honor and grieve your history.

On this Easter Sunday, I’d like to encourage you add to this practice what I am calling “ressurrectos.” If descansos are the places of little deaths, I’d also encourage you to take time in prayer and contemplation to survey your life for the little resurrections, those moments of growth and healing and possibility, those times of new life and hope, make a life map of those times when you realized that the sun would rise again, and you would not only survive but thrive.

And, after you’ve made a survey of your little resurrections and have given thanks for them, I challenge you to share that Good News. Be an agent of healing and hope. Live an Easter life, which, while marked by grief, not only receives new life in Christ, but shares it.

Christ Is Risen! Let’s go tell the story of what a difference this has made in our lives, that it may redeem others as well. Alleluia and amen!

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**John 20:1-18, Isaiah 55:1-12**  
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