



**A World Ripped Apart**  
**John 20:1,11-18**  
**Reflections from Ronald Braxton**

Gordon MacDonald's book, *Rebuilding Your Broken World* is a confessional and true story of the author who lived through the rebuilding of his own personal world after it had been ripped apart by a life that had fallen into disgrace, despair and tragedy. Similarly, today we are living in a global society that is being ripped apart by sickness, death, pain, emptiness, hurt and sorrow caused by this horrible pandemic. No individual, class or group of people, race or nation is being spared from the chilling grip of "Covid-19".

As we think about the approaching Easter/Resurrection season, as we are called upon to "Shelter in place," can we still celebrate Easter/Resurrection Sunday and the season leading up to Pentecost? The regular observances and trappings must change and will not take place. All night vigils, sunrise services, worship in our small sanctuaries and grand cathedrals, children's programs, the glamor of the Easter parade, festive family meals, Easter egg hunts will serve as a past memory for 2020.

What's your take? Jonathan Walton writes, "Easter is our annual reminder that the sting of death has no purchase over the gift of life. Resurrection Sunday is the perennial promise of God's provision that blooms through the concrete cracks of grief and despair. Without the resurrection, tragedy triumphs and our problems prevail. With the resurrection, however, beautiful hymns of hope spring from the human heart".

Can we, should we celebrate Easter/Resurrection Sunday? Give a thought to the biblical character, Mary from Magdala. She comes to the grave of Jesus with her own healing story. Theologian Edith Deen says, "Whatever it was that afflicted Mary Magdalene, Jesus had healed her, and she had become his faithful and devoted follower. Into her living death, He had come with the power of life, and had taught her victory over her so-called demons. After his healing, she had become a fully poised woman." Can you imagine her devastation now? Can you imagine the confusion, the brokenness, pain, suffering and hurt? On her way to the cemetery, Mary's world had been ripped apart. The very foundation of her new life had collapsed on the cross and her hopes and dreams for a better and brighter tomorrow now rest in a cold grave.

All of the other followers, out of fear of their own death, were sheltered in place. But "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb...she stood weeping outside the tomb...she turned around and saw Jesus standing there...Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord" (John 20:1ff). In the graveyard, Mary with her own eyes,

becomes the first witness. She sees the risen Savior and her testimony to the others marks the first Easter/Resurrection celebration, "They came running..."

Can we, should we celebrate Easter/Resurrection Sunday? For me, the answer is a resounding Y E S! Our faith calls us to celebrate; from the face and place of death comes resurrection. From our cemeteries, from our pain, hurt, struggles and anguish new life is birthed. From our broken worlds, God sends the resurrected Lord, Jesus, to rebuild, restore and renew our lives. We have every reason to celebrate the resurrected and living Lord; it will sound the trumpet of hope. The messianic voices of Hallelujah "King of Kings and Lord of Lord...He reigns forever and ever" will drown out our fears and eclipse our weeping and sorrows. The 2020 Easter/Resurrection Sunday will birth new ways of worship and celebrations. The Church, the body of Christ present on earth sends forth the clarion call that restoration, reconciliation, renewal and new life will come. We have not been forsaken. From the cemeteries of our despair, He stands at the entrance of our tombs declaring, and proclaiming, "I am alive." John C. Holbert writes this affirmation. "From the darkness of the tomb of death and pain arises the surprise of new and unexpected life."

In whatever ways we can, in all the unorthodox ways we can, we must celebrate Easter/ Resurrection Sunday. We must, though our hearts be weary and our eyes weep from loss:

*Rejoice, rejoice O Christian, lift up our voice and sing  
Eternal Hallelujahs to Jesus Christ, the King!  
In all the world round us, we still see His loving care,  
And though our hearts grow weary we will never despair.  
We know that He is leading through all the stormy blast,  
The day of His deliverance will come at last...  
He lives; He lives Christ Jesus lives today...*

*(My own adaptation)*

Edits from Rev. Dr. Marie P. Braxton