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*The Sacrament of the Present Moment*  
Acts 10:34-43; Luke 24:1-12

If you were asked by someone who is unfamiliar with the Christian faith what Easter is all about, what would you say? Would your answer be limited to an event that happened 2,000 years ago? Would it have to do primarily with what happens at death for those who hold certain beliefs?

Like Christmas, the Easter season has developed its own secular rituals that are always fun for kids—such as, Easter egg hunts, Easter baskets being left by the Easter bunny with surprises of candies and other goodies, and who knows what else. If Easter does anything at all, it should wake us up to the sacredness of every day.

Far more people in our culture think of themselves as spiritual than those who regularly attend a church or synagogue. These people want to grow closer to God, but not at the expense of an institutional religion and its creeds, confessions, and church wars, whether large or small. Some have resigned from the religions and denominations they once belonged to, taking with them the things they found beneficial and discarding the rest. For others, they've found practices, such as meditation and yoga, which seem to provide a kind of solace that judgementalism, antique language, and rituals seem to leave barren and hollow.

People are willing to go to great lengths to get what they know is out there, yet can't quite seem to find right where they are. Several years back, a minister was asked to speak at another church. When she asked, "What do you want me to talk about?" the inviting pastor responded, "Come and tell us what is saving your life now."

How would you answer such a question? What is it that your life is depending on? How do you stay close to that which is so vital to you? For me—at this point in my life—it is trying to live life to its fullest every moment of every day. Looking closely at every simple or great event for meaning...to every pleasant and unpleasant experience for an element of truth. If we don't realize

that our most important experiences are happening to us right now—the very moment we are breathing and our hearts are beating—we will surely miss the “More”—what Jesus called the “abundant life.”

If anything, Easter seems to be a flag flying at full mast reminding us that God exists and that more than anything else, God desires for us to experience life in all its fullness, despite where we are, what disease we might be fighting, or what bad luck may have come our way.

A 2008 “Time” magazine article did a ranking of “The Greatest US Presidents.”<sup>1</sup> Abraham Lincoln, a Republican president during the Civil War and who was assassinated before completing office, took the number one spot.

George Washington, our nation’s first president of no party took the second spot. He was the noted General during the American Revolutionary War, expanded the Union, and established a system of taxation, a national bank, and the first Supreme Court.

The third spot fell to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the only president elected to four terms. He came into office during the Great Depression and died in his thirteenth year of office. Recently, I became aware again of how his devastating bout with polio affected, positively, his leadership. Having grown up as a person of privilege, he served first as a senator of New York, accepted an appointment as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and ran unsuccessfully for Vice President before contracting polio. From that point on in his life, he was totally and permanently paralyzed from the waist down. For many, his political career was over. Depression set in. During the worst time in his life, he retreated to rural Georgia to a small community known as Warm Springs. While the hydrotherapy of the warm spring waters seemed to provide improvement of his mobility, the influence of other polio victims and poor people in that area had the greatest impact on his life. It was a resurrection story. In the worst of times, the best came forth. Had he not paid attention to the pain, great discouragement of his affliction, and the needs he saw in that environment, he may well have resigned to being an invalid in early retirement, rather than running for governor of New York, then president of the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> Nico Hines, “The Greatest US Presidents—The Times US presidential rankings, *Time Online*, October 31, 2008.

This is what some refer to as the “Sacrament of the Present Moment”—learning to become fully awake no matter what the circumstances. If Easter is about anything, it is about becoming conscious of the living Christ in everything we encounter. If Easter was only about an executed God-follower whose body was miraculously healed and restored after his death, the Church would never have been born. It was about a living spirit that could not be executed by Rome or anyone else that lived on to challenge life at its highest level. For two thousands years, the resurrected Christ has ushered in change at the highest level. It turned around the biggest persecutor of the early Church and inspired him to be known as the great missionary of the early Church. For two thousand years, the living Christ has inspired, encouraged, and provided wisdom and strength to whomever has his ears, eyes, and hearts open.

But, resurrection has always been the way of God. My favorite Old Testament character is Jacob. Seeking privilege and desiring first place at any cost from his birth, Jacob quickly estranged himself from his family. He cheated his older brother out of his birthright. He deceived his aging father into giving him his brother’s rightful blessing. Even in his “second chance” life, he cheated on his uncle, building his own large flock of “blemished” lambs and goats by intentional mating of opposite colored animals. But, his life was an ongoing resurrection story. In the last chapter of his life, Jacob struggles with the very angel of God, not being content until he experiences the something “More” that can only come from God. Jacob discovered that all the blessings and all the wealth in the world would never take the place of what his life longed for most—intimate connection with the very source of life itself and the peace that comes with the discovery. He had been given hints and signs of how this relationship worked, yet Jacob had a difficult time accepting that what he was looking for was not in the future or some distant land. It was a sacrament of the present moment and present place.

During Jacob’s escape from his brother Esau early in life, he found himself alone in the desert—a nomad wandering from conflict in hope of a future. With his father dying and having walked as far as he could on one of those days with nothing more than the clothes on his back, he looked around for a stone to use as his pillow for the night. Finding one, he went to sleep. Maybe the dream he had

was from the warmth of the sun-heated stone, or maybe it fell out of the sky. Wherever it came from, it was vivid. A ladder stretched from the earth to the heavens with angels ascending and descending on it. Finally, the very presence of God was there with him promising him never to be alone. God would provide him with safety, children, and land. When he woke up, Jacob said, “Surely, this is the very gate of heaven.”

When it happens, how do you know it? Can you prove it? One thing is for sure—you can’t *make* it happen. All you can do is keep your ears, eyes, heart, and mind open so that in the most common of events, the best of times, and the worst of times, you don’t miss this gift of the presence of God. That’s what Easter is really about.

In a recent *Christian Century* article by Will Willimon<sup>2</sup>, he tells about Methodist students working in Haiti following the devastating earthquakes. The most disarming thing about the country was the laughter of the children, along with their raucous singing. Were they oblivious to what had happened? How dare they sing when their life expectancy is so horribly short? Was their laughter a way to escape from the tragedy of their lives, or was it a smart rebuke to the rest of the world’s assumption that their lives were trapped in tragedy? As darkness fell upon Port-au-Prince after the earth heaved that January night, people danced in the street and sang hymns. On CNN, Anderson Cooper was incredulous.

If we aren’t careful, we will hold on to our Good Fridays and miss the resurrection of Life altogether. It’s not back there two-thousand years before you. It’s right here. Right where you are standing. Listen, the children of Port-au-Prince are singing it: *Christ the Lord is Risen today. Alleluia!*

*Do not stand at my grave and weep.  
I am not there; I do not sleep.  
I am a thousand winds that blow;  
I am the diamond glints on snow.  
I am the sunlight on ripened grain;  
I am the gentle autumn’s rain.*

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<sup>2</sup> William H. Willimon, “Now Can We Sing?” *The Christian Century*, March 23, 2010, pp. 11-12.

*Do not stand at my grave and mourn.  
I am the dew-flecked grass at dawn.  
Where tranquil oceans meet the land  
I am the footprints in the sand  
To guide you through the weary day.  
I am still here; I'll always stay.*

*When you wake up to morning's hush  
I am the swift uplifting rush  
Of quiet birds in circled flight.  
I am the stars that shine at night.  
Do not stand at my grave and cry.  
I am not there; I did not die.*

*(Mary Elizabeth Frye)*

**Acts 10:34-43**

34Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality,35but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.36You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ — he is Lord of all.37That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced:38how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.39We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree;40but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear,41not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.42He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead.43All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

**Luke 24:1-12**

1But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 2They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3but when they went in, they did not find the body. 4While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.6Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." 8Then they remembered his words, 9and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles.11But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.