

April 5, 2026—Easter Day  
The Rev. James Wyatt

## The End of the Story

“In the beginning,” the Gospel of John tells us, “was the Story.” Now, usually we hear that translated as “the Word,” but the Greek word Logos can mean a lot of different things, and one of them is “story,” and I’ve been thinking and talking a lot about stories, so I’m going to run with it: In the beginning was the Story, the Story of God, the divine Story. Right there, in the beginning, in God’s rich and infinite imagination. It was the Story of all things, and when God began to tell it, all things came into being.

The stories that we tell tell us who we are. They tell us how we’re supposed to relate to the world and to God and to all the other people around us. They are how we make sense of the world. The way we tell our own life stories—the things we choose to tell, and the things we leave out, the connections we make, the lessons we learn—all of that shapes how we understand ourselves. And the stories we tell about our faith—the themes we lift up, the elements we highlight, the connections we make—all of that shapes us, too. It shapes our understanding of who God is and how we relate to God.

In my sermon on Good Friday, I talked about how Christians, from the very beginning, have told lots of different stories in an effort to make sense of the fact that Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, was crucified. And I said that, ultimately, we don’t really see how a story fits together and whether it all makes sense until we get to the end.

And now, here we are at the end—the happy ending, of course, in which Mary Magdalene and one of the other Marys first hear the good news that Jesus is alive and then see him for themselves. For them, I suspect the story was pretty straightforward: this man they loved came to Jerusalem, caused a fuss, and ended up crucified like a bandit or a rebel. They thought they had lost him, and then, early on Sunday morning, to their great surprise and delight, they found that they had not.

There is a rich and simple beauty to that story. It doesn’t have to *mean* anything more significant than the joy of being reunited with a loved one we thought we’d lost.

But that story has been told over and over again by Christians around the world for nearly two thousand years now. Clearly it’s not quite so simple, just a story of the happy reunion of beloved people. Because of who Jesus is to us, and in light of all the other stories that the church tells and has told about who Jesus is and what his life and ministry and death all mean, his resurrection takes on more layers of meaning than that simple, beautiful joy.

So, for example, when we look at the story of Jesus we might highlight the ways he challenged our understandings of power, how he urged us to serve each other and proclaimed that God is in charge, not the forces of Empire. Clearly, the forces of Empire felt threatened by him, by his message and his popularity, and they crushed him. Because that’s what Empire does, it tries to squash anything it perceives as a threat to its own power, anyone who might claim power of their own or share power with others. I think it’s fair to say that any human Empire would kill God if given the chance... and in Jesus, the Empire of Rome had that chance. And on Friday and Saturday, the forces of Empire breathed easy, satisfied that this threat to their power had been taken care of. And then early Sunday morning, God said no.

God said no to the dominating, oppressive power of Empire that leads only to death. God said no to all the forces that seek to crush us, dehumanize us, silence and suppress us. God said no to the lies and misinformation that try to turn us against each other, that urge us to fear and hate our neighbors. And even more importantly, early Sunday morning, God said yes to the way of community, of kin-dom, of peace. God said yes to the power of love that leads to flourishing, abundant life. God said yes to life and joy and celebration, to healing and wholeness and second chances.

To take another example, when we look at the story of Jesus we might highlight his incarnation—the incredible idea that the divine Word, the Story of God became flesh and dwelt among us, taking on every part of human life, from birth to agonizing, God-forsaken death.

That means there is no part of our lives or our deaths that is alien to God, nothing we can go through that God doesn't know from personal experience, and nothing—in the words of the Apostle Paul—“neither death, nor life, ... nor things present, nor things to come... nor anything else in all creation...” nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39) So on Friday and Saturday, the incarnate Word of God lay dead in a tomb, as we all will, sharing even that part of human existence with us. And then early Sunday morning, God said ... well, God didn't exactly say no, more like “Yes, and.”

God said yes, suffering and death are part of what we must experience, part of this existence as humans. Yes, *and* they do not have the final word. Life and love and joy are stronger than death, stronger than suffering and grief.

I want to read this paragraph from *The Book of Joy*, by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and journalist Douglas Abrams, whose voice here is summing up what the Dalai Lama and the Archbishop had taught him in a week they spent together: “The two leaders had told us over the course of the week that there is no joy without sorrow, that in fact it is the pain, the suffering that allows us to experience and appreciate the joy. Indeed, the more we turn toward the suffering, our own and others', the more we can turn toward the joy. We accept them both, turning the volume of life up, or we turn our backs on life itself, becoming deaf to its music.” (p. 303)

I expect the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu would explain that phenomenon differently, but for the Archbishop, at least, I think that truth—that the only way to know joy is to be open to the full experience of human life—is rooted in the incarnation. Jesus lived a human life so that we can meet God in every part of our human lives.

One more example: when we look at the story of Jesus we might highlight the words and metaphors Jesus uses in the Gospel of John to describe himself: the Bread of Life. The Resurrection and the Life. The Way, the Truth, and the Life. The Light of the World. The Good Shepherd. The True Vine. These are all images of abundant life, of God's life abiding in us and us abiding in God's love. Jesus' death, in that context, feels like a shock—how could the one who raised Lazarus from the dead be killed himself? But he also described himself as a grain of wheat that, when it falls into the earth and dies, bears much fruit. So on Friday and Saturday, the Light of the World went dark, the Bread of Life lay dead and buried in the ground. And early Sunday morning, it sprouted—the True Vine burst forth from the earth in glorious, abundant life and shares that life with all who abide in him.

I feel like, somehow, that brings us right back to the simple, beautiful story of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary being reunited with their beloved. Except that their beloved—our beloved—is the source of abundant life: living water for all to drink, delicious bread to feed the world, light to banish all the world's darkness.

Dear friends, Christ is risen! As we abide in him and he abides in us, may we find our true flourishing and taste the abundant life he gives. Amen!