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# Yes, But

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A Sermon By  
The Rev. Andrew W. Walter

April 16, 2017  
Grace Episcopal Church  
Silver Spring, Maryland

*An audio version of this sermon can be found on the Grace Church website at*  
<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2017-04-16-AWW.mp3>.

**Yes, But**  
Matthew 28:1-10

The Rev. Andrew W. Walter  
Grace Episcopal Church  
The Sunday of the Resurrection  
April 16, 2017

*So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."*

Matthew 28:8-10

As they walked to the tomb that first Easter morning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were drowning in grief. It had only been two short days since Jesus' death, and while other people in Jerusalem were just beginning their day, trying to forget what had happened or pretend like nothing had happened, the two women couldn't do that.

For them, Good Friday was about the most awful day you can imagine. The women lost their best friend and teacher, the person they loved more than anyone else, and to make it even worse, the women didn't understand why. Jesus only wanted to bring love into the world, and yet, people said terrible and nasty things about him. Some cheered while Jesus hung on the cross. Others stood by watching, allowing it to happen. Some even scoffed and taunted Jesus. It didn't make any sense to the women, and so, their sadness was deep and immense.

But then, as dawn broke on the horizon, the two women arrived at the tomb. There was an earthquake, and the angel appeared, telling the women Jesus was alive. The women were scared out of their minds and didn't know what to do, so they left as quickly as they could, running off to find the disciples, when all of sudden, out of nowhere, Jesus was there, standing right in front of them. "Greetings," he said.

What a moment that must have been – the two women coming face-to-face with the risen Christ, their sorrow and fear and unbelief giving way to hope and excitement, as they realized everything Jesus said, and everything Jesus promised, was true. It was the culmination of the entire biblical story, going all the way back to Adam and Eve. It was the moment God revealed God's agenda of love and healing and wholeness. It was like an eighth day of creation, in which the slates were wiped clean, and everything was born anew, and anything was possible.<sup>1</sup> "This is the Lord's doing," the Psalmist wrote, putting into words what the women felt, "and it is marvelous in our eyes."

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<sup>1</sup> Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust*.

It is that marvelous moment that brought us all here today. We wanted to be in church for Easter, to celebrate that moment and get a little taste of what those two women experienced: the hope, the excitement, the joy. That's what makes Easter so special – the way we feel inside when we see the flowers, hear the music. There is nothing, nothing, like Easter, and, if we are honest with ourselves, if we are really honest, all of us can probably use Easter right now.

There are so many days in life that feel like Good Friday, when something happens that leaves us shocked and shattered, and that seems particularly true recently. If you think back over the last year, I am sure each of you experienced some sort of setback, or heartache, or loss. Maybe you were out of a job, or confronted with an unexpected health scare. Maybe someone you loved dearly passed away. Or, maybe you felt demeaned, marginalized, even mistreated, because of your religion, sexuality or the color of your skin.

As I look back over the past year, I can't help but remember some of the anguish I've seen. I sat with couples whose relationship was strained. I knew of some young adults who took their own lives. I spoke with parents who were afraid for their children, because they are immigrants, or Muslim, or people of color. I heard from gay and lesbian friends who were concerned about their civil rights. And, like many of you, I participated in our Lenten book discussion in which we talked about the injustices of our justice system.

In many ways, it feels like it's been a really hard year, and so, at some point, all of us were probably wondering: Why? Why is this happening? Why are things like this? Why me? Why now? Why?

But, in the face of those questions, we hear God's reply today. Today, we are reminded that we live in a "Yes, but..." kind of world.<sup>2</sup> Yes, things may seem bad at times, but when they do, God still has a plan. Yes, we may be sad and afraid at times, but when we are, God is not far away. And, yes, it may feel like Good Friday at times, but when it does, Easter is just around the corner, because no matter what we are going through, no matter how bleak things are, God is still at work. Even if we can't see it, and even if we can't feel it, God is still out there, doing what God does, opening another door, creating new life, offering healing and wholeness and a love that never dies.

That is God's reply in the face of our questions. Good Friday is not the end of the story. It never was. It never is.

Nobody knew that better, of course, than Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. They realized it the marvelous moment Jesus said "Greetings." The women understood that God's agenda was bigger than just them. God's agenda included everyone, which is why the women had to find the disciples. The women couldn't keep Easter to themselves. There were people out there who needed it, people who yearned for some hope and joy and love. So, the women had to share Easter

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<sup>2</sup> Willian Sloane Coffin, *Collected Sermons*.

with the disciples, who would share it with someone else, who would share it with someone else, who would share it with someone else....

Until now, it's our turn. It's our turn to pick up where the disciples left off, because there are still people out there who need that Easter feeling.

A few weeks ago, I attended a meeting with other churches from around the Episcopal Diocese of Washington to learn about the Sanctuary Movement. Several churches in our diocese are comprised predominantly of immigrants, and for those people, these days, it feels like Good Friday

At the end of the meeting, the bishop was wrapping it up, when a young Hispanic man, in his late 20's or early 30's raised his hand. "Can I speak for a minute?"

You could tell the bishop was hesitant. She didn't know what the man wanted to say, and she was reluctant to give up control of the meeting. "Just three minutes," the man said. "Please."

The bishop agreed, and when the young man stepped to the microphone, he began to share his personal story.

He came to this country several years ago, and, in his first year of high school, his grades were all "E's." But, his second year, he earned all "C's." By his third year, it was straight "A's" and that continued through his senior year. The young man was able to attend college, where he earned a degree in construction management, after which he started his own construction business. Today, that business employs 6-10 during the year and grosses in the six figures. But, that young man is afraid. He is afraid he will lose his home. He is afraid he will lose his family.

"All I want to ask," he said, "is that you opens your hearts to us. We are not all bad people like you hear on the news. We are not all criminals or involved in drugs. Please, open your hearts to us."

We are not meant to keep Easter to ourselves. Easter is not meant to stay in this building. It's not meant to stay on our corner of Georgia Avenue and Grace Church Road. Easter is meant for everyone, and there are people who are yearning for it, so go out there and give it to them. Share a little hope, share a little joy, share a little love. Open your hearts to someone. The world needs it right now.

Amen.