

[Easter Sunrise 1<sup>st</sup> Luth 2018 A Light Shines]

EASTER SUNRISE  
APRIL 1, 2018

FIRST, MARSHALL  
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER  
PSALM 118:19-29; JOHN 20:1-18  
*A Light Shines in the Darkness*

*Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*



I think of Mary...

I think of Mary walking to the tomb in the early morning darkness...  
her mind numb with pain...her spirit dragging in the dirt...  
her heart heavy with grief.

Our experience of a loved one's death, especially a sudden tragic death,  
often makes us feel as if we're strapped into a  
sudden-moving, body-jerking, high-flying roller-coaster ride.

We feel pushed and pulled, to and fro, high and low –  
sometimes crawling and other times falling;  
we gasp and we cry, we scream and we sigh,  
and we wonder *when*...or *if* the experience will ever end.

Now there are some pretty reliable rules about life as we know it:

-*roller coaster rides* almost always come to a **peaceful** end...  
 -the lane of traffic moving faster always slows once you pull into it...  
 -**and**...the *death* of a *loved one* means the end of that relationship.

Granted, there are a few temporary exceptions to **such** rules,  
 but that's *all* they are. The wheel of time continues to turn –  
 and we know this to be absolutely true: death will happen to everyone.

In that same vein, we say that **nothing** is sure in life except two things:  
**death** and...**taxes**...and though we may **admit** that they are **absolutes**,  
 still we work very hard to: *limit what we owe to the IRS* **and** to *live as long as we can*.

In fact, we've embraced a whole heap of *societal laws* – as well as  
good, common sense rules – to help us live as long as possible:

Look both ways before...crossing the street.

It's against the law to drink and...drive...

Click-it or...ticket.

Never leave your luggage unattended.

Take your vitamins. Exercise regularly. Don't play with matches.

Eat healthy foods. Don't do drugs. The list goes on and on...

And the **reason** we **have** all these rules is that life is really very *fragile*.  
**Mother Nature** operates by a terribly strict principle called: *the survival of the fittest*.

Now the **good** news is that we humans have the amazing ability to  
**adapt** to our environment. The **bad** news is that we **don't** come  
*naturally equipped* with a lot of defenses against many of nature's  
**threats**.



One of those **hazards** is at the **forefront** of our Minnesota experience for what seems like 6 months out of **every year**: the **menace** of winter.

We've not been created to hibernate.

We can't grow a thick coat of **fur** (heck, some of us can't even grow a head-ful of hair!).

We're not able to **eat** bark or branches; bed **down** in the snow, or even **feast** like **crows** on road-kill.

**Instead**, we have to rely on our ability to create a **false** environment to preserve our lives in this climate. We need to find secure sources of fuel to heat our homes **and** to generate electricity to power our lights. Life is **fragile** – life is **precious** – and so we take very seriously these two realities: 1) while the blessing of **love** brings life to our **relationships**, 2) the curse of **death** brings an end to **life**.

That's why Easter is such a powerful experience for us –

**Jesus'** resurrection,  
the **Messiah's** amazing emergence from the tomb,  
the **Lord's** ability to break those burdensome bonds of death –  
it helps us **hope** that maybe, just maybe, **another** *absolute law* is  
**absolutely** more **powerful** than death. And that helps us hope that

maybe, just maybe, God will **continue** to bless our relationships with loved ones: from years gone by and in years yet to come...



...Now, while thinking about this sermon all week, I had an **epiphany**, a **flash of insight**, a **light-bulb click-on** in the dimness of my brain. I have long loved a verse of scripture from the very opening of the Gospel of John. We say it every time we worship using the Holden Evening Prayer Service, so a lot of you are familiar with it too. It's John 1 verse 5. *The light shines in the darkness and...**the darkness has not overcome it.*** I'll say the first part and you can help me finish it:

The light shines in the darkness...*and the darkness has not overcome it.*

It's beautiful, don't you agree? I've loved it for so many years because it's **comforting**, it's **hopeful**. **But**, it wasn't until this last week that I realized just how **daring**, how **radical**, how **outrageous** is the **claim** that John is making in these few, simple words.

... I want to go back to our *rules about life* for just a minute, and ask you a question. **What is stronger: DARKNESS or LIGHT?**

-Light can dispel darkness, but light needs energy to shine  
 -**Darkness**...just needs to be **patient**.

When the power for a light dies out (as it always will), then darkness will reign supreme. That's the foundation of every scary story that's taken place on *a dark, stormy night*... Power fails, candles go out, flashlight batteries die – and we humans, who are good at adapting to our environment, cannot see worth a hoot in the dark.

We can't see **clearly** in *a dark, stormy night*...  
 We can't see **spiritually** in *a dark night of the soul*...  
 -when **hope** is lost,  
 -when **faith** has failed,  
 -when **love** is left to languish after a relationship has died...  
 we are, for all practical purposes, lost in the dark, unable to see.

That's where we find *Mary Magdalene* on that first Easter morning ***while it was still dark*** (20:1) says John. Life does **not** get any **brighter** when she finds the tomb of Jesus ***empty***, and **then** can't get anyone to help her recover the body of her rabbi that she's sure has been stolen!

Though the night is fading, the light does not come on in her heart... ***until*** she **hears** the Lord **speak** her name – ***Mary*** says Jesus – and ***then***:



Then the dawn *breaks*, the sun (Son) *shines*, the Light of the World *blazes* with a radiance that will never die. The Risen Christ is the Light of Hope and God is the never-failing source of that flame.

He is the One who **also speaks** your name and mine, urging, encouraging, commanding us to confess to the world that:

- the *laws of life* have **changed**;
- the **days of death** are **numbered**,
- the *dark night* of our *soul's grief* is **fading** in the dawning light of Jesus Christ.

That's what the gospel writer means when he says, *The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it*. **This** is now **our** law of life, our **absolute edict**, our **perfect** and **perpetual principle**: *The light shines in the darkness...and the darkness has not overcome it!*  
**Alleluia! Amen!**