

1 Sermon, Easter 2013

Texts: Matthew 28:1-15, Matthew 6:22-23, Matthew 10:26-27, John 8:12
Title: "Open or Covering Up?"

1. Christ Is Risen

Easter is the essential Christian holiday. If nothing else were celebrated, Easter should be. Because Easter is the center of the Christian message:

Christ is Risen!

Therefore: life triumphs over death

Forgiveness triumphs over sin

Love triumphs over indifference

Goodness triumphs over evil

These are ultimate realities. We don't always see them in the present moment, but in time, God triumphs. Goodness, love and forgiveness triumph. Absolutely.

And when Goodness, love and forgiveness triumph, the evil things are laid bare, sin is exposed, and because sin is exposed, it is rendered powerless.

And it's ironic how this Easter story – this story that is about God's goodness and light triumphing over darkness and evil – has in it a cover-up.

Matthew's gospel tells us that some of the guards posted near Jesus' tomb went to the chief priests. The guards told the chief priests about the earthquake that opened Jesus' tomb, and the angel who appeared and was as bright as lightning.

The chief priests paid the guards to cover it up, and say that Jesus' followers came and stole his body away while the guards were asleep.

2. A Cover-up

Is it surprising that there was a cover-up?

—Not really, not after all the chief priests had gone through to crucify Jesus in the first place.

That's what sin is – to try to hide the goodness of God and insist on our own way. We know what sin is like. We've each wanted to hide something about ourselves that we don't like. We've each wanted to make ourselves look better — and whenever we try to make ourselves look better, we turn away from God.

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For the rest of the sermon, I'd like to talk to you about Easter as the opposite of a cover-up.

Easter instead rolls away what blocks the light. Christ disinfects by letting the light in. And then healing comes.

3. Easter is the rolling away of what blocks the sunshine,

and letting the light out (or in).

Earthquake and stone

Easter is the great revealing of the truth: God is love.

4. The light of Christ disinfects.

So it is that when people set aside lies and coverups, God brings new life.

Sunlight is the best disinfectant," a well-known quote from U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, refers to the benefits of openness and transparency.

In Other People's Money, Brandeis wrote:

Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants; electric light the most efficient policeman.

The cheapest and easiest way to disinfect water? Sunlight. Just leave a clear glass or plastic bottle out in the sun for six hours. Solar water disinfection is an age-old method touted by the World Health Organization for areas where access to clean water is limited. UV rays in the sunlight tear apart the microbes to make water safe.

This will only work if the water isn't cloudy. For cloudy water, you add a little clay and salt to settle the cloudiness.

5. Christ brings healing, wholeness and salvation

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When Christ uncovers, he also heals.

When Jesus uncovers, and shines light on the darkness of our lives, he heals.

Malachi 4:2 But unto you who revere and worshipfully fear My name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings and His beams, and you shall go forth and gambol like calves [released] from the stall and leap for joy.

6. Magdalene Community

Founded in 1997 by [Becca Stevens](#), an Episcopal priest on Vanderbilt's campus, Magdalene is a residential program for women who have survived lives of prostitution, trafficking, addiction and life on the streets.

Thistle Farms is our social enterprise

A few highlights of the Magdalene program:

- For two years, we offer housing, food, medical and dental needs, therapy, education and job training without charging the residents or receiving government funding.
- Our six homes function without 24-hour live-in staff, relying on residents to create a supportive community, maintain recovery, and share household tasks.
- Women come to Magdalene from prison, the streets and from across the Southeast and the country.
- The women of Magdalene/Thistle Farms range in age from 20-50, and many have been sexually abused between the ages of 7-11, began using alcohol or drugs by 13, have been arrested on average a hundred times, or have spent about 12 years on the street prostituting.
- 72% percent of the women who join Magdalene are clean and sober 2 1/2 years after beginning the program.

We furnish housing for 30 residents and graduates and provide outreach services to women still living on the streets. New residents are given a key and are offered the necessary resources to maintain recovery, heal from childhood wounds, become physically healthy and find employment.

After four months, the women find work, return to school and/or enter Magdalene's job training program at Thistle Farms, a social enterprise. Magdalene also offers a matched savings program to help residents prepare for economic independence upon graduation. Women who remain in recovery two

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years post-graduation are eligible for a new home buying program administered by two local congregations and Magdalene.

Magdalene's programs are grounded in its 24 spiritual principles that advocate living gracefully in community with one another. Residents, graduates, staff and volunteers share daily tasks, offer hospitality, build on each other's strengths, and provide compassionate, disciplined support.

Magdalene was founded not only to help a subculture of women, but also to help transform the culture itself. We stand in solidarity with women who are recovering from abuse, trafficking, addiction, and life on the streets, and who have paid dearly for a culture that continues to buy and sell women.

Magdalene stands as a witness to the truth that in the end, love is more powerful than all the forces that drive women to the streets.

"After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." 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;

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there they will see me." While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened. After the priests had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them, "You must say, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' If this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story is still told among the Jews to this day." Matthew 28:1-15, NRSV.

"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" Matthew 6:22, 23, NRSV.

"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'" John 8:12, NRSV.

"So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops." Matthew 10:26-27, NRSV.

http://www.thoughts-about-god.com/angels/md_healing_light.html

The Healing Light of Jesus

Mary DeWitt

I had been very ill for quite sometime and had many surgeries at a young age. Life was not going well and I was sick all the time.

One night I went to bed early hoping the next day would be better. I had a dream about being in these beautiful woods, next to a river of water that was crystal clear. I cannot put into words what a peaceful, serene place this was. I was alone and enjoying the awesome beauty. The next thing I saw was this wonderful bright light coming from the heavens. At first, I was terribly afraid. I crouched down and covered my head. Then as the light came closer, I saw Jesus surrounded by this awesome bright light. As I realized that Jesus was coming closer and closer, I no longer felt afraid as this peace and loving feeling went through my entire being. The light touched my body and then started to ascend back to the heavens.

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I shot up in bed and gasped for air as if I had not been breathing. The next day I felt better than I had felt in a long time. I began to get well again.

At first I thought that it was just a dream but in hindsight I realized that it had been much more than a dream as my health improved so rapidly. I have always had a very strong faith in God and this dream only solidified my belief.