

Thankful Memorial, Chattanooga  
April 9, 2023  
Year A, Easter Day  
*Jesus Not Included*  
The Rev. Leyla King

Acts 10:34-43  
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24  
Colossians 3:1-4  
John 20:1-18

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

A few weeks ago, against my own better judgement, I bought my kids some plastic eggs for their Easter baskets. I say “against my better judgement” because these weren’t just regular eggs; each of the dozen eggs holds within it a unique packet of lego-type building bricks. There’s a buildable bunny and a wreath of flowers, a little white lamb and a yellow chick. But best – or maybe worst – of all, there is a buildable lego-Jesus – get this – *on the cross*<sup>d</sup>. Later this afternoon, when my kids play with their Easter gifts, one of them will literally have to lego-crucify Jesus.

So, you can see why this was perhaps *not* the best gift for a priest to give her kids. I mean, aside from the whole crucifying thing, Easter is about Christ’s *resurrection*, not his death. These eggs are deeply theologically inaccurate to boot!

But I just couldn’t help myself. And the thing that finally made me click “add to cart” was a review from one “Greg Miller.” Greg bought these dozen eggs a few weeks before I did and he wrote a poor review of them on Amazon because when Greg opened the box, he was disappointed to discover he was missing the Jesus egg! So, in his review, fantastically titled “Jesus not included,” Greg wrote, “They did not include Jesus in my order!” And I was desperate to find out if Jesus would be included in my eggs.

And, friends, if there was ever an Amazon-review fit for Easter Sunday, it is Greg Miller’s of these plastic eggs. Just like Greg’s review, this Sunday could be titled “Jesus not included.” And, maybe it’s just me, but poor Greg’s “They did not include Jesus in my order,” sounds strikingly similar to Mary’s lament in John’s gospel: “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”

Because, you see, no matter what the description says online, no matter what the usual course of events would be, on this Easter Sunday – on every day – Jesus defies our expectations. Greg Miller thought he’d open his egg and find the crucified Christ. Mary Magdalene thought she’d open the tomb and find Jesus’ dead body. But Easter upends our expectations and the risen Lord refuses to turn up in the places and the ways 21<sup>st</sup>-century Greg or first-century Mary or any of us imagines him to be. Not in the egg. Not in the tomb. Not containable. Not understandable. Not even easily recognizable. And most certainly not dead.

No, open up this Easter Sunday, and Jesus is not included. At least not in the ways we want or expect him to be.

Because if we are honest with ourselves, we *do* want a certain Jesus. If Christ is risen today, if death is defeated today, if our bondage to sin and systems of evil is broken today, we want and expect all of that to look a certain way. After all, a war that kills innocents in Ukraine rages on. And here at home, innocents in Nashville and Uvalde and Sandy Hook are killed, too. And there seems to be

another war raging, much closer to us, perhaps not with guns but with words and laws, that targets the already-marginalized and oppressed. Political division and power-grabs in every place threaten the well-being of our neighbors and our friends, our communities, our countries and our climate. And that's on top of all the personal but no less profound losses and tragedies and griefs and fears of our daily lives.

This Easter Sunday, when we find the tomb empty, we look up and expect a certain kind of risen Christ to appear. He will come in power and great glory: He will break the weapons we wield against one another with divine violence. He will punish the evil-doers with his righteous wrath. He will raise up *our* dead and turn back time to when things just weren't so hard. He will solve all the problems *we* have made and, in one fell swoop, make everything better again. We expect to open up our Easter Sunday morning and find a Christ of our own creation. And so we are disappointed to discover that the Jesus we have built in our minds – *that* Jesus – is not included.

In the midst of her grief and confusion and fear, Mary looks into the empty tomb and suddenly sees what was not there before: two angels who wonder at her weeping, a kind of invitation into hope. And when she turns around, there before her is the *actual* Jesus. But who among us would recognize the risen Lord – the one we have all those expectations of – as this humble man, seemingly like all others? Surely, like Mary, any one of us would have been equally blind to his identity, presuming him to be the gardener. How can this be the Christ who will beat our swords into plowshares? He doesn't *look* like the Lord of all who judges in righteousness.

But the risen Christ is not some lego-man we can build according to our own designs and desires. No. No. We cannot cling to this Jesus. He cannot be contained in the little spaces where we try to keep him. Not in the tomb. Not by our wishes. Not for our own gains. We do not hold this risen Lord; rather, he holds us and calls each of us, like Mary, by name. And when, finally, we see him for who he is, he sends us forth, like Mary, in *his* name, to do his kingdom's work.

“Go!” he commands us. “Go to my brothers...” Go to my sisters. Go to my siblings, my friends, my beloveds throughout this weary world. Tell them of this encounter with a risen, uncontainable, unfathomable Christ. Tell them that Jesus lives and so we have our work to do. Tell them the good news: Alleluia! Christ is risen! (The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!). Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> To view the Amazon listing, click [here](#).