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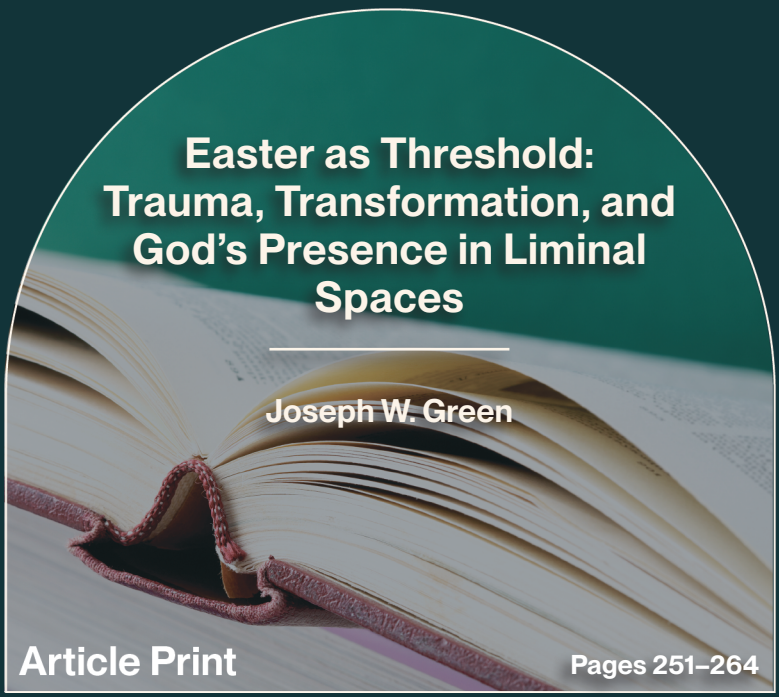

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Easter as Threshold: Trauma, Transformation, and God's Presence in Liminal Spaces

Joseph W. Green

Abstract: *Using the context of Easter, this personal essay explores perceptions of God's presence and absence during human suffering. There is a theological thread that ties Christ's suffering for our griefs and sorrows during his Atonement directly to his ability to succor us as we enter into despair due to our own trauma. Our suffering occurs during moments of transition and vulnerability known as "liminal spaces." It is in these moments that the Savior meets us at the threshold, helping us move through trauma toward transformation in Christ. Our ability to move forward openly in liminal spaces will help us to recognize God's presence in these moments as well as to discern the reflection of his presence in those who minister to us in our grief.*

Today begins that sacred transitional space just before Easter that we refer to as Good Friday, the day on which Christians worldwide commemorate the Crucifixion of the Savior on Calvary. Good Friday is a threshold through which we enter a period of darkness, grief, and despair that is only overcome by the burst of light that arrives with the Resurrection on Easter Sunday.

During this time, I am thinking about Easter in the context of how Christ's Atonement can lead to divine comfort and presence during sickness and sorrow. This is because, in my work as a chaplain in clinical settings, I often visit patients who have experienced significant trauma due to health issues, from amputations to open-heart surgeries, post-traumatic stress disorders, or perhaps the death of a loved

one. As we sit together to process their grief, some of them turn to me, tears in their eyes, asking, "Where is God in my suffering?"

In my experience, this pleading usually addresses not the question of God's existence but rather the timing of his perceived absence. In many instances, the patients I sit with *have* experienced a connection with the divine in the past but now feel alone and abandoned. This is a theme often explored in the Hebrew Bible. During several festivals throughout the year, Israelites were expected to gather at the temple to stand in God's presence, often expressed as seeing (or seeking) God's face.[1] When they felt his absence, they would often cry out in distress, "Why do you hide your face?"[2] Joseph Smith, experiencing prolonged suffering in a jail in Liberty, Missouri, had a similar plea: "O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?" (Doctrine and Covenants 121:1).

Like the petitioners in the Psalms, and like Joseph Smith, I too have asked this question in similar moments of distress. Just over a year ago I found myself attending, within the space of a few days, the funerals of two different soldiers who had died by suicide. After the second service had finished, I found myself leaving the chapel and driving to my father's grave. Once there, I stood by his headstone, tears flowing like a river, looking for comfort, and attempting to understand and process the wave of grief and sorrow that I felt. But more than that, I wanted to know where God's presence was during the communal suffering that had spread through distraught families and our military formations like the far-reaching roots of an aspen grove.

If there is any time where it is appropriate to begin a conversation about our perceptions of God's presence and absence in our moments of grief, then it is surely now during this time when we reflect on Jesus's own journey of pain and suffering as he left the upper room to first visit Gethsemane and then to tread the "Way of Sorrow" that led to Calvary and the cross. I would like to open that discussion here by

1. E.g., Psalms 17:15; 27:8. For a treatment of this idea, see Andrew C. Skinner, "Seeing God in His Temple: A Significant Theme in Israel's Psalms," in *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise, and Worship in the Old Testament* (2013 Sperry Symposium), ed. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, Matthew J. Grey, and David Rolph Seely (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013), 270–90, scholars archive.byu.edu/facpub/3497/.
2. E.g., Psalms 13:1[2]; 88:14[15]; Job 13:24). The numbers in brackets represent the versification in the Hebrew Bible. All biblical quotations are the author's own translations.

offering a few theological observations about how Christ's Atonement impacts human suffering, how this applies to the psychology that informs our understanding of vulnerability and transformation during moments of transition, and how I have internalized these concepts as I have acted as a spiritual guide for those on journeys of grief and loss.

There is a strong theme running through many scriptural texts that affirms God's presence in our suffering. For example, speaking of our "many afflictions," the psalmist proclaims, "God is near/close to those whose hearts have shattered" (Psalm 34:18–19[19–20]). But many New Testament authors understood this promise of the Lord's presence during our sorrow to be connected to his own suffering and sacrifice. A key text in this tradition is Isaiah's fourth Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13–53:12), which speaks of a servant of the Lord who "lifted up our sickness and carried our suffering" (Isaiah 53:4).[3] Additionally, this figure "was wounded for our transgressions" and "crushed for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5). In its context in Second Isaiah, this hymn spoke of an intense suffering that overcame sin and iniquity for a multitude or nation.[4] Several New Testament authors would use this as a framework in which to explain Jesus's death and Resurrection as a victory over sin and death.

These same authors, however, would also apply this passage not just to redemption from sin but to Christ's mercy and love during moments of physical sickness and suffering. The author of the Gospel of Matthew, for example, tells us how Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, as well as many others that were brought to him (Matthew 8:14–16), deliberately connecting these actions to Isaiah's suffering servant: "This in order to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, 'He took our infirmities and bore our illness'" (Matthew 8:17).[5] In the Book of Mormon, Alma also referenced this Isaianic passage in a similar way: "And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled

3. The familiar KJV has "he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."
4. See, for example, Shalom M. Paul, *Isaiah 40–66: Translation and Commentary*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 398, 404.
5. While I agree with the many scholars that see this as a commentary about Christ's compassion for physical illness and trauma, some have argued that Matthew's point here focuses rather on spiritual healing instead. For a review of different perspectives on this passage, see G.K Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), s.v. "Matthew 8:17."

which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people" (Alma 7:11).[6] But Alma's reading of these lines is slightly different from Matthew's. Here it is not solely about Christ healing the sick but rather about his ability to understand their grief and sorrow in a way that leads to a ministry of divine presence. He took upon himself their pain and sickness "that his bowels may be filled with mercy," so that he would know "how to succor his people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:12). In fact, Alma's reading of Isaiah uses parallel lines of poetry to argue that Christ "will take upon him death" and "will take upon him their infirmities" (Alma 7:12), a summary of the Atonement that emphasizes death and *suffering* more than death and *sin.*[7] This is a powerful idea that needs to be explored more fully in Latter-day Saint conceptions of sin, grace, and atonement.

From a human perspective, this trauma and suffering occurs when we navigate transitional periods that are known as liminal moments (from the Latin *limen,* "threshold"). Liminality refers to those times when we have already left one state (physically, mentally, or emotionally), but have not yet arrived at our destination because we are still standing on the threshold of change. Anthropologist Victor Turner refers to this as being "neither here nor there" and "betwixt and between."[8] Franciscan theologian Richard Rohr describes liminality as when "the old world is left behind, but we're not sure of the new one yet."[9] That sensitive, vulnerable moment of transition between sleep and waking is liminal space, as is a loss or change in employment, the birth of a child, the death of a loved one, missionary service, military deployments, serious

6. Here I concur with Thomas Wayment's argument that Alma is quoting from Isaiah's fourth servant song, in Thomas A. Wayment, "The Hebrew Text of Alma 7:11," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 98–103, 130, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol14/iss1/10/.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 18:11 also summarizes Christ's Atonement with similar parallel ideas about death and trauma instead of death and sin: "the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men."
8. Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 95. Turner himself nodded to the French folklorist Arnold van Gennep's use of the word *limen* to describe a crucial phase of rites of passage in various cultures, where the individual separates from their cultural context, enters a transitional period, then reintegrates back into society (p. 94).
9. Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1999), 132, archive.org/details/everythingbelong0000rohr_l8e5/page/132/mode/2up.

injury and illness, and many other periods of change and transition that we navigate in our lives. Much of my childhood was characterized by these moments of transition, like when our family fled from Taiz, Yemen, to Cairo, Egypt, in the wake of a military coup. On the day I left the funeral of a service member to stand at my father's grave, I traded one liminal space for another, trying to make sense of a new heartbreak through the lens of a known prior grief.

According to what we know from human psychology, liminality is a threshold that divides the known from the unknown. It is "characterized by ambiguity and uncertainty of identity but also as having the potential to transform the person."[10] And because of the volatile and explosive nature of this space, the potential for transformation is far greater than when we are in safe, non-liminal moments.[11] But when standing on this threshold beset by uncertainty, we are often presented with two options: to defensively retreat backwards, away from the change towards the safety of known and hardened identities and spaces, or to begin an open and transforming movement forward across the threshold into "an area of accessibility and multiplicity of possibilities, a virtual place for new connections."[12]

It is this liminal space filled with uncertainty in which scripture identifies the Lord providing presence, healing, and transformation. This is why he is often pictured at the threshold while inviting us forward toward transformation. In John, Jesus is the door (or gate) through which the sheep enter the fold (John 10:7, 9); in the epistle to the Hebrews, he is the curtain/veil through which we pass into the holy of holies in the temple (Hebrews 10:20); in Revelation, he stands at the door and knocks, waiting for us to hear his voice and open the door (Revelation 3:20). Channeling the language of Isaiah, Jacob tells us that we must press forward on a path towards transformation but that

10. Matías Barros et al., "Private Speech and Imagination: The Liminal Experience Between Myself and Others," *Human Arenas* 3 (2020): 458, doi .org/10.1007/s42087-020-00110-0. Here they cite research from P. Stenner, M. Greco, and J. Motzkau, "Introduction to the Special Issue on Liminal Hotspots," *Theory & Psychology* 27, no. 2 (2017):141–46.
11. Raffaele De Luca Picione and Jaan Valsiner, "Psychological Functions of Semiotic Borders in Sense-Making: Liminality of Narrative Processes," *Europe's Journal of Psychology* 13, no. 3 (2017): 536, ejop.psychopen.eu/index.php/ejop/article/view/1136/1136.pdf.
12. De Luca Picione and Valsiner, "Psychological Functions of Semiotic Borders in Sense-Making," 539.

the Holy One of Israel is "the keeper of the gate" (2 Nephi 9:41). In these instances, the Savior *is* the threshold, or he stands *at* the threshold.

Good Friday, followed by Easter Sunday, comprise the ultimate threshold, the single greatest transitional journey of suffering followed by the single greatest transformation, symbolized by the familiar liminal imagery of a threshold. Only *this* doorway leads to an empty tomb, a discarded white linen shroud lying on the bench inside. Jesus is not there; he is risen; he is transformed. He has crossed over that threshold in order to stand at our own doorways of uncertainty and sorrow and offer comfort and grace. Given all of this, why is it that when we enter these vulnerable liminal moments we sometimes perceive that we experience a divine absence instead of a redemptive presence?

I suggest that some of the answers to this question will come as we explore how these liminal moments force us to stumble into the unknown inside our own minds and hearts as well as in our relationships with those around us. During Holy Week, Jesus taught that the great commandment consists of loving God with all of our heart, soul, and mind, and our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37, 39). Heart, soul, and mind are images that reflect internal systems, the crossing of thresholds into the unknown inside of ourselves. This is also implied in loving your neighbor *as yourself,* which also points to internal thresholds. When we add God and our neighbor, then this means that there are also external, interpersonal thresholds, where we need to act in faith and trust with the divine and with those around us. And these internal and external liminal horizons are connected. Poet and philosopher David Whyte has said that the "foundation of mystical experience" is bringing what lies beyond the threshold of what we know inside of us into conversation with what lies beyond the threshold of what we know in the outer world outside of us.[13]

There are times, however, when the intensity of our suffering has us moving away from these internal and external thresholds, blocking our awareness of the unknown both within and without. This is a natural and very human reaction; however, in these moments we sometimes tune everything else out except for our own trauma. One patient I visited struggled intensely with pain while her husband held her hand, worried about her condition. I held her other hand and sat with her for

13. Where Shall we Meet, "On Consolations with David Whyte," YouTube video, 40:38, 26 November 2024, youtu.be/OZ-Xm4KMh2s. Whyte here uses the vocabulary of internal and external horizon lines to refer to thresholds, or liminality.

a while, providing another presence. As I allowed myself to hold space for her suffering, I felt an aura or reflection of the divine in her countenance. This was a remarkable woman who radiated spiritual goodness. In between deep breaths, she told me that she had recently felt completely alone because her focus had been on the intensity of the pain. As she defensively moved back from this threshold within, it impacted her ability to see external thresholds as well. She said that as she shrank back in fear of her pain, she wasn't even aware of her husband holding her hand. Then she made a decision—she described it as an act of faith—to let go, to accept that she was in pain, to stay with it, and then to move forward to see what was beyond it. At that point, she said that she became aware not only of those around her, like her husband, but of the Savior's presence, of his love and grace in her suffering. While she was still in pain, she knew that she was being supported by her husband and by God's presence.

Others I have visited only became aware of this divine comfort as they reflected back on their suffering. When one patient told me that he was looking for God's presence, I asked him about his experiences with the divine in the past. He thought about this for a while and then talked in detail about several times where he had felt God's love and comfort. As he related these moments to me, he became emotional as he realized that in these experiences he had indeed felt God's love during his suffering but had only become aware of this presence later, when he was looking back on them. He saw a pattern, and this pattern moved him to begin to try to increase his awareness of God's love in his current moment of grief. This patient lived Richard Rohr's observation that "we tend not to see the pattern, and how God is our transformer, until *after* the fact."[14]

There are other factors that can limit our ability to move forward in openness toward internal thresholds of transformation, including unrealistic expectations. I have visited with some who have felt abandoned because they were not being given the outcome of complete healing that they both wanted and expected. While complete physical healing, an end to suffering, and a return to prior health status is certainly a possibility, just as likely is the probability that we need to transition into a new health status where conditions have changed. This reality can create an ambiguity or disorder at the frontier of our emotions, and this messiness is both natural and acceptable. Faced with unfathomable

14. Rohr, *Everything Belongs,* 20, emphasis in original.

trauma that lay ahead, Christ, praying in Gethsemane, also looked for a different outcome: "Father if you will, take this cup from me" (Luke 22:42). Our own willingness to sit at this frontier of ambiguity allows us to enter vulnerable liminal space where neither continued suffering nor complete healing are either assured or certain.

Feelings of shame and unworthiness can also limit our journey towards liminal threshold moments. These are basic human emotions that lead us to believe "that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love, belonging, and connection."[15] Jungian psychoanalyst James Hollis has observed that "the experience of *abandonment* is often internalized as an implicit statement about our worth or value to the other."[16] Yet this cause and effect works the other way as well, with many of us starting with feelings of unworthiness or shame and then concluding from this that we have been abandoned by God. One patient I visited, trembling in her suffering, insisted that God had abandoned her because she had not been diligent (in her own judgment, not God's) in reading her scriptures, praying, or attending church services. She had projected her sense of unworthiness onto God, making her believe that she had been rejected by him.

This kind of thinking is debilitating and leaves no room for God's grace, infused with love and the ability to succor us after taking on himself our pains and sickness. As Elder D. Todd Christofferson has stated, "We do not need to achieve some minimum level of capacity or goodness before God will help — divine aid can be ours every hour of every day."[17] Yet many of us within Latter-day Saint culture are not hearing this and have judged ourselves based on some idea of minimum worthiness and as a result then move to feelings of abandonment or even anger. When we do this, we move defensively away from the threshold toward prior hardened positions, feeling that we are being punished. Latter-day Saint philosopher Adam Miller has argued that the idea of suffering as a form of God's punishment likely stems from the protestant notion of original sin and that Latter-day Saints, who reject this theology, should leverage restored scripture

15. Brené Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are* (Center City, MN: Hazelden Publishing, 2010), 52.
16. James Hollis, *Why Good People Do Bad Things: Understanding our Darker Selves* (New York: Gotham Books, 2007), 98, emphasis in original.
17. Elder D. Todd Christofferson, "Free Forever to Act for Themselves," *Ensign,* November 2014, 19, churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2014/11/saturday-morning-session/free-forever-to-act-for-themselves.

instead to show that it is God's grace and not sin that is original, and that this grace is an expression of Christ's Atonement where he suffers *with* us.[18] This idea sounds a lot like Alma's application of Isaiah's suffering servant text to the Atonement, where the focus is on trauma and not on transgression. Christ suffered our pains precisely so that he could succor us while we experience those pains, and we do not need some minimum level of "personal righteousness" to receive that grace. If we are truly to love our neighbor as *ourselves,* then we should also think of loving God as God loves *us.* This means that when the Lord says that "the worth of souls is great in the sight of God" (Doctrine and Covenants 18:10), we should accept that he is talking about us personally.

Another reason why we are sometimes unaware of God's presence in our suffering is that we can overlook the reflection of the divine in those who succor us. Each of our patient's rooms contained a white board on the wall that lists important things about the patient's care, including the nurse's name, contact information for the patient's family members, and the medications the patient is taking. Additionally, one area of the board was dedicated to the patient's "plan of care," consisting of the goals that the patient must accomplish before being discharged. One day I was visiting with a lovely lady who had experienced a good deal of suffering and trauma in her recent health journey. However, she routinely exhibited an optimistic and joyful attitude, and so I asked about her sources of comfort and hope, and how she found meaning in the midst of her affliction. Pointing to the goal section of the white board on her wall, she smiled and said, "Every morning I look at the phrase 'plan of care,' and I think of it as 'God's plan of care for me.' And when I do that, I know that every person who comes through that door to help me is representing God as they carry out his plan."

We need to practice becoming more aware of those who come to our aid while reflecting the divine image. One of the things I love about Lehi's dream (1 Nephi 8) is that he begins his journey in liminal space, a "dark and dreary wilderness" (v. 4), and then moves forward in openness (in spite of his suffering) toward transformation in Christ at the tree. Wilderness (Hebrew מִדְבָּר) in biblical texts generally refers to "the area between fertile settled areas and the true desert,"[19] so Lehi

18. Adam S. Miller, *Original Grace: An Experiment in Restoration Thinking* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: BYU Maxwell Institute, 2022), 59.
19. Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100, Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 20 (Dallas: Word Books, 1998), 56–57.

is inhabiting in-between threshold space here. But during his moment of trauma, someone appears, a man "dressed in a white robe" (v. 5), who tells Lehi to "follow him." No other dialogue is noted, and I wonder about the interpersonal connection that is developed between them. The white robe is reminiscent of the linen dress worn by temple priests who entered the presence of God, so this person reflects the presence of the Lord to Lehi as he stands in his threshold of suffering. In fact, the "presence of the Lord" is the exact interpretive lens Lehi uses to understand this dream (v. 36).[20]

According to Matthew's timeline, it is during Jesus's own liminal journey of suffering during Holy Week that he tells his disciples that they are to see the presence of the Lord in those who are suffering: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you received me as a guest" (Matthew 25:35). We usually think of this from our own vantage point, attempting to see a reflection of the Savior in those we succor, but from the perspective of those who are suffering, this means that they also have the opportunity to experience God's presence when someone arrives to succor them. In other words, they should see God's reflection in *us* as we help them. One afternoon a few months ago, I sat with a Muslim patient who was in a good deal of pain. I held his hand and helped him recite from a *Surah* in the Qur'an that brought him comfort and relief. Afterward, tears in his eyes, this wonderful man told me, "I think we have both felt God's presence here today," summarizing precisely how I also felt. The educator of our Clinical Pastoral Education seminar, the Reverend Dr. Mariclea Chollet, often asks us what reflection of the divine we are sharing with our patients. As we enter liminal moments of suffering, then, recognizing the "presence of the Lord" in others who come to assist us involves moving forward in openness toward the threshold between us and them. At the same time we are in dialogue with what lies beyond the threshold inside of us, allowing our neighbors to minister to us and looking for God's presence in the liminal space as they do.

A final thought in this discussion about the presence or absence

20. See Jennifer C. Lane's exposition of "presence of the Lord" here, in "The Presence of the Lord," in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision* (2011 Sperry Symposium), ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 119–34, rsc.byu.edu/sites/default/files/pub_content/pdf/The_Presence_of_the_Lord.pdf.

of the Lord in our suffering is the observation that there are times when we really are alone, as modeled by Christ himself. Just before Jesus's death on the cross, the authors of Mark and Matthew both use the words of Psalm 22:1 to articulate Christ's agony at being alone: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:4; Matthew 27:46).[21] However brief our moments of aloneness may be, we can look to the Lord's experience for perspective and understanding. I suspect that for us, we are often granted this space in order to fully identify the contours of the threshold lines between what is us and what is the divine grace that supports us. As the noted Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung observed, "The patient must be alone if he is to find out what it is that supports him when he can no longer support himself."[22] This dialogue with aloneness is an act of faith where we can move forward in openness to become aware of exactly how God's love operates in our suffering. In Lehi's dream, after he wanders "for the space of many hours in darkness" (1 Nephi 8:8), he does not mention the presence of the man in white anymore. Has this man left and is Lehi now alone? In any case, Lehi chooses here to move forward, praying to the Lord for his mercy and grace, revealing the edges between Lehi's aloneness and the divine support for which he is looking.

In the scriptures, this aloneness is always followed by a divine presence. It is a pattern that is repeated throughout the biblical narratives relating the last days of Christ's mortal journey during Holy Week and culminating in the Resurrection on Easter Sunday. But it is especially prominent in the Gospel of John, whose author reserves approximately half of his entire gospel to discuss these liminal days of Christ's last week. The author prefaces this with the story of Lazarus, which in the final form of this gospel, appears to occur in the month or two just before Holy Week begins.[23] Here Mary Magdalene and Martha send Jesus a message that Lazarus is ill, but Christ delays his visit to them by several days. When he arrives and calls for Mary, she kneels at his

21. I'm grateful for my conversations with the Rev. Nancy J. Cormack-Hughes, Director of Spiritual Care at St. Mark's Hospital, for this part of the discussion.
22. Carl Jung, "Psychology and Alchemy," *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, vol. 12: Psychology and Alchemy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), para. 32, as cited in Hollis, *Why Good People Do Bad Things,* 87.
23. There is widespread agreement that the story of Lazarus has been moved within John's gospel during editing. For a summary of the discussion, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John (I–XII): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 29, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 427–30.

feet, weeping, saying, "Lord, if you had been here…" (John 11:32). Mary had been with Martha and those who had come to console them, but in another sense, she had felt entirely alone, looking for Christ's presence. He had been absent, and then, as she weeps, he appears, weeping with her (v. 35). He is about to bring Lazarus back to life, yet in this moment he holds space to sit with her in her sorrow, "to mourn with those that mourn" and to "comfort those that stand in need of comfort" (Mosiah 18:9). Absence, followed by a presence that fully comprehends our pains and sickness because he took upon himself our grief and sorrow.

We see this same pattern at the end of Christ's journey of suffering on Good Friday. Mary Magdalene is "standing near the cross" (John 19:25) as Jesus is in pain. Earlier we had seen the disciples in Gethsemane struggle to stay awake as Jesus asked them to sit with him in his anguish. Yet here is Mary at the cross, holding a presence for him at the very end, while likely suffering immensely herself. And then he is gone, and she is now alone. It is in the darkness that she comes on Sunday morning to the garden tomb, approaching this liminal space in what had to have been considerable trauma. Weeping, she looks through the threshold of the doorway and sees the angels, and then turns around and encounters the risen Lord. "Mary," he says to her. There was an absence and now there is a presence that encompasses her suffering.

As we stand on the threshold of this precious time in Christ's journey of suffering and transformation that includes this incredible liminal space from Good Friday until the joy of Easter Sunday, this is the time to consider our own periods of transformation and God's purpose for these liminal journeys. As David Whyte says, "Sometimes with the bones of the black sticks left when the fire has gone out, someone has written something new in the ashes of your life. *You are not leaving, you are arriving.*"[24] God is waiting for us to arrive at these thresholds of change, and this is the whole point behind his suffering and his Resurrection, so that his grace and love can permeate our lives during our liminal moments filled with fear, anguish, longing, hope, and faith. As Richard Rohr put it during his 2012 Easter homily, "What the Resurrection is saying more than anything else is that love is stronger

24. David Whyte, *The House of Belonging* (Langley, WA: Many Rivers Press, 1997), 38, emphasis in original.

than death."[25] This love that is stronger than death is God's presence that awaits us at the threshold.

This is Easter.

Brigadier General Joseph W. Green *(US Army, Retired) is a chaplain resident employed by Episcopal Community Services, providing clinical spiritual care to patients, their families, and hospital staff at both St. Mark's Hospital in Millcreek, UT, and Lone Peak Hospital in Draper, UT. His military service includes deployments to both Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as assignments as Commander, 300th Military Intelligence Brigade (Linguist); Chief, Intelligence Disciplines Division at the Headquarters, Department of the Army (Pentagon); and Commander, Utah Army National Guard. His military decorations include the Distinguished Service Medal and the Bronze Star Medal. He received a BA in Spanish Translation and Interpretation from Brigham Young University, a Master of Strategic Studies from the US Army War College (Distinguished Graduate), and a Master of Divinity (Concentration in Biblical Languages) from Regent University.*

25. Center for Action and Contemplation, "Easter Sunday (2012) | Homilies with Richard Rohr | CAC Podcasts," YouTube video, 5:35, 11 June 2023, youtu.be/s4BTjyl91_w?si=beaiq-bwtYDXW3Lm.

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