

AColyte

Easter 2025

A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things
at Austin College



RISE AGAIN!

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A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things at Austin College

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

Teetering in the Pulpit

Easter 2025

Fall down six times; stand up seven

Fall down six times; stand up seven

Fall down six times; stand up seven

That's how you make it.

--Walt Wilkins

I graduated from Austin College in May of 1984.

I moved to Austin that summer and began my studies at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in August.

The next August, my good friend **Andy Blair** also enrolled in Austin Seminary.

Andy and I had been friends at Austin College. We spent a lot of time together, mostly playing music in our band the Tone Deaf Cowboys.



(That's Andy sitting in front of me.)

When Andy got to Austin, we picked up where we left off and kept playing and singing.

It was fun to be together in Austin in the mid-80s. And we were kind of on the fringes of the folk music scene down there.

One of the musicians we met at that time was an old, folk singer named Allen Wayne Damron. Allen used to refer to himself as a “hickey” – half hippie, half hick.



Andy and I had met him at the Kerrville Folk Festival in '84 or '85, and we'd occasionally run across him at one of his shows or at a party around Austin.

He even came to hear us a time or two.

Allen was a talented singer, a good performer, and a really nice guy. He wrote some of his own songs, but he also had a good ear and he recorded and performed a lot of great songs by other writers.

When Andy and I were hanging out with him, Allen was regularly performing a song called *The Mary Ellen Carter*. That song was written by Canadian singer/songwriter Stan Rogers.

Andy and I liked it because it made us think about Easter.

It's a made-up story about a fictitious shipwreck.

And it's a great song.

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*O she went down last October
in a pouring driving rain.
The skipper, he'd been drinking
and the Mate, he felt no pain.
Too close to Three Mile Rock,
and she was dealt her mortal blow,
And the Mary Ellen Carter settled low.*

*There were five of us aboard her
when she finally was awash.
We'd worked like hell to save her,
all heedless of the cost.
And the groan she gave as she went down,*

*it caused us to proclaim
That the Mary Ellen Carter would rise again.*

These first verses establish that the singer and his friends are facing a traumatic loss.

Their ship sank.

Things had clearly not turned out the way they hoped or expected.

*Well, the owners wrote her off;
not a nickel would they spend.
She gave twenty years of service, boys,
then met her sorry end.
But insurance paid the loss to us,
so let her rest below.
Then they laughed at us
and said we had to go.*

There's your villains.

The ship's owners clearly don't recognize the trauma of the sailors.

They don't seem to have any affection for the ship.

They laughed at the singer and his friends who didn't want to give up — who wanted to work to salvage the ship.

The owners think the story is over and the sailors are sentimental, foolish, and naïve.

*But we talked of her all winter,
some days around the clock,
For she's worth a quarter million,
afloat and at the dock.
And with every jar that hit the bar,*

*we swore we would remain
And make the Mary Ellen Carter rise again.*

The singer and his partners are not ready to give up and abandon the old ship.

They think there's still something worth working for.

They don't think the story is over.

They want to make the Mary Ellen Carter rise again.

*Rise again, rise again,
that her name not be lost
To the knowledge of men.
Those who loved her best
and were with her till the end
Will make the Mary Ellen Carter rise again.*

"Rise again."

Can you guess why I thought of that song?

On Easter morning?

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*All spring, now, we've been with her
on a barge lent by a friend.
Three dives a day in hard hat suit
and twice I've had the bends.
Thank God it's only sixty feet
and the currents here are slow
Or I'd never have the strength to go below.

But we've patched her rents,*

*stopped her vents,
 dogged hatch and porthole down.
 Put cables to her, 'fore and aft and
 girded her around.
 Tomorrow, noon, we hit the air
 and then take up the strain.
 And watch the Mary Ellen Carter Rise Again.*

They haven't given up.

It's hard, dangerous, frustrating, discouraging work.

But they've stuck with it.

Together.

They're gonna make the Mary Ellen Carter rise again.

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I'll tell you how the song concludes in a minute.

But first I want to show you how the Gospel of Luke tells the story of the burial of Jesus.

At the end of the story of Jesus, he:

- Goes to Jerusalem for Passover
- Gets betrayed by Judas,
- Gets arrested for being a troublemaker and dangerous revolutionary,
- Gets convicted for blasphemy and sedition, and
- Gets executed by being nailed to a cross.

Let's pick up the story there, after Jesus has died, beginning in Luke 23:49:

⁴⁹ But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching these things.

Jesus' friends watched him die.

*⁵⁰ Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph who,
though a member of the council,
⁵¹ had not agreed to their plan and action.*

To execute Jesus.

*He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea,
and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God.
⁵² This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.
⁵³ Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth,
and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb
where no one had ever been laid.
⁵⁴ It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning.*

So it was Friday night.

*⁵⁵ The women who had come with him from Galilee followed,
and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid.*

There were a lot of women who has become followers of Jesus.

⁵⁶ Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments.
At that time, it was the custom for women to dress and anoint dead bodies
so they wouldn't stink.

On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

On to luke, chapter 24:

*But on the first day of the week, at early dawn,
they went to the tomb,*

*taking the spices that they had prepared.
² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,*

Definitely not what they had expected.
 There was no stone blocking the opening of the tomb.

*³ but when they went in they did not find the body.
⁴ While they were perplexed about this,*

“perplexed”
 Ya think?

*suddenly two men in dazzling clothes
 stood beside them.*

*⁵ The women were terrified
 and bowed their faces to the ground,*

“terrified”
 Well...yeah.

*but the men said to them,
 “Why do you look for the living among the dead?
 He is not here but has risen.
⁶ Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee,
⁷ that the Son of Man must be handed over
 to the hands of sinners
 and be crucified
 and on the third day rise again.”
⁸ Then they remembered his words,*

See Luke 9:21-22, Luke 9:43-45, and Luke 18:31-34.

*⁹ and returning from the tomb
 they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.*

*¹⁰ Now it was Mary Magdalene,
Joanna, Mary the mother of James,
and the other women with them
who told this to the apostles.*

So Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and some other women go to Jesus' tomb to take spices to dress and anoint his body.

But when they get there

- the stone has been rolled away from the front of the tomb
- Jesus isn't there
- and two men show up and ask them "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

Then the women go back and tell the apostles what they've seen.

*¹¹ But these words seemed to them an idle tale,
and they did not believe them.*

¹² But Peter got up and ran to the tomb;

The apostles don't believe the women, and Peter runs to the tomb to see for himself.

Now there are certainly plenty of lessons in there about believing women and pointing out that women were actually the first Christians to

- bear the Good News of the risen Christ
- to proclaim the Gospel
- to share the Easter message.

That's all true, and I'd be happy to talk to you about all those things sometime.

But, right now, I want us to think about Peter.

*¹² But Peter got up and ran to the tomb;
stooping and looking in,
he saw the linen cloths by themselves;*

*then he went home,
amazed at what had happened.*

Think about what must have been going on with Peter that day.

He had been following Jesus for three years.

He had witnessed amazing acts of healing and service.

He had dedicated his life to Jesus.

He had loved him deeply.

Jesus had taught and praised and encouraged him.

And then he had seen it all come crashing down.

In the days immediately preceding this story, Peter had watched as Jesus was betrayed, arrested, and executed.

Not only that, but in the midst of those terrible days, Peter had panicked and denied that he even knew Jesus (see Luke 22:54-62).

As that Sunday morning dawned, Peter had to have been in an awful place.

But still, somehow, at that time of complete and utter demoralization, despair, disappointment, and disillusionment, Peter was still with the other disciples.

He couldn't leave.

He was still there.

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Back to the song.

*For we couldn't leave her there, you see,
to crumble into scale.
She'd saved our lives so many times,
living through the gale
And the laughing, drunken rats
who left her to a sorry grave
They won't be laughing in another day. . .*

"Laughing, drunken rats."

Luke 22:63-65 says

*⁶³ The men who were holding Jesus
[after he had been arrested]
began to mock him and beat him;
⁶⁴ they also blindfolded him and kept asking him,
"Prophecy! Who is it who struck you?"
⁶⁵ They kept heaping many other insults on him.*

In John 19:28-29 Jesus says

"I am thirsty."

And then the soldiers guarding him

*put a sponge full of [sour] wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his
mouth.*

Clearly, Peter knew about laughing, drunken rats.

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Last night at the Austin College Chapel service, we sang my favorite hymn
in the entire Presbyterian hymnal – *Christ Is Risen, Shout Hosanna!*.

In the third verse of that song, we sang about a “grim, demonic chorus.”

On that first Easter, as he left the women and headed to Jesus’ tomb, Peter knew all about the grim, demonic chorus.

He was all too familiar with all the voices that told him he had wasted his time following Jesus — that said his faith had been complete foolishness.

Still, Luke 24:12 says that, after he heard what the women were saying,

*Peter got up and ran to the tomb;
stooping and looking in,*

Peter “stooped and looked in” to the tomb.

He bent over so he could see inside.

*Peter got up and ran to the tomb;
stooping and looking in,
 he saw the linen cloths by themselves;*

The “linen cloths” had been used to wrap Jesus’ body
 when he was buried.

The cloths were there, but the body was gone!

*Peter got up and ran to the tomb;
stooping and looking in,
 he saw the linen cloths by themselves;
 then he went home,
 amazed at what had happened.*

After all he had witnessed in the last few days--amidst all his real despair, disappointment, and disillusionment—Peter went to Jesus’ tomb, **stooped** over and saw that the tomb was **empty**!

And he was amazed.

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The last verse of *The Mary Ellen Carter* says:

*You, to whom adversity
has dealt the final blow
With smiling bastardss lying to you
everywhere you go
You, to whom adversity
has dealt the final blow
With smiling rascals lying to you
everywhere you go
Turn to, and put out all your strength
of arm and heart and brain
And like the Mary Ellen Carter, rise again.*

Do you know what Peter had to do

- after he had stooped over to look into the tomb and
- before he could go home and continue his life?

He had to rise again.

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As I mentioned above, we sang *Christ is Risen, Shout Hosanna! Last night*.

The third verse of that song says:

**Christ is risen! Earth and heaven
Never more shall be the same
Break the bread of new creation
Where the world is still in pain
Tell its grim, demonic chorus,
“Christ is risen! Get you gone!”
God, the First and Last, is with us**

Sing Hosanna, everyone!

Peter knew that “grim, demonic chorus” and so do we.

The “grim, demonic chorus” is made up of all the voices in our lives and in our world that say:

*“You’re not the right kind of person,
and there’s nothing you can do about it”*

or

“People like you don’t deserve to be respected or cared for.”

or

“You will have to change before God will love you.”

Unfortunately, lots of us are very familiar with that grim, demonic chorus.

But, like Peter, we Christian types believe the tomb is empty.

And that changes everything.

We who believe the tomb is empty need to tell those voices--that grim, demonic chorus:

“Christ is risen.

**GET
YOU
GONE!!**

We need be sure that those are not the only voices.

With our words and our actions, we need to respond to the grim, demonic chorus by telling the truth

- That despair, disappointment, disillusionment, and death might be real
- But they are not the last word.

We need to keep telling the truth

- That the smiling bastards and the grim, demonic chorus are wrong!
- That God has not and will not abandon us
- That love is always the last word

When we find ourselves like Peter at the tomb—demoralized, disillusioned, and grieving—let's do what he did.

Let's rise again.

Let's stand up straight in live in the world where Easter is true.

We cannot quit.

We cannot despair.

We cannot give up.

Because we know the tomb is empty.

We have to rise again.

We have to be strong.

For each other.

And for those who can't be strong.

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Here's how the song ends:

*You, to whom adversity has dealt the final blow
 With smiling bastards lying to you
 Everywhere you go
 Turn to and put out all your strength of arm,
 and heart, and brain
 And—like the Mary Ellen Carter—rise again!*

*Rise again! Rise again!
 Though your heart it be broken
 Or life about to end
 No matter what you've lost
 Be it a home, a love, a friend
 Like the Mary Ellen Carter, rise again!*

When it gets hard,

When you get tired of being lied to,

When it feels like it's all crashing down,

Rise again.

Until next time, I remain
 Just Another Cowboy Preacher,
 Reminding Myself not to Respond to Meanness with Meanness
 Or Being Disrespected By Being Disrespectful,

JOHN WILLIAMS
 Chaplain

P.S.

Here's a link to the Stan Rogers version of the song:

<https://youtu.be/FJQkKof3opg?si=eNiJV8HzQDwvoj9T>