

Just in case, you are a point in your life
where you have forgotten
some of the Egyptian mythology
you once may have learned;
I'd like to re-cap one version
of the story of Osiris, Isis, Horus and Set.¹

In this story, you may hear echoes
of other stories you probably grew up hearing:
this will likely sound familiar.

Here we go:



Osiris was the primeval king
of the Egyptian gods
and he and his wife/sister, Isis
have a son named Horus.
Osiris's evil brother, Set
became jealous of Osiris
and wanted to kill him so that
he could be king.

But Horus would be next in line for the throne,
so evil uncle Set
wants to kill Horus too.

¹ https://www.patheos.com/blogs/teachingnonviolentatonement/2019/04/ancient-resurrection-stories-how-jesusistransformingtheworld/?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Progressive+Christian&utm_content=43#_ftn1 Story adapted from sermon and source of Donna Rosenberg, World Mythology: An Anthology of the Great Myths and Epics, (Chicago: NTC Publishing, 1994) 162-168.

Set tricks Osiris and kills him;
he dismembers the body
and scatters the parts of Osiris's
throughout the land.
Isis, fearful of what Set could do,
fled with Horus into the wilderness
to live for many years.
But there is a prophecy
among the gods
that Horus would eventually defeat Set
and avenge his father's death.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4efZIHtiQQ> play for 10 secs)
(beginning of the Lion King)

Right? Sounds familiar.

You may have even thought
of Abram the primordial father of Israel
who also has a wife/sister
...but anywho, back to Egyptian story.

Set knows about this prophecy
and so he is on a mission
to find Horus and kill him.
So one day when Isis is in the city,
Set finds Horus and sends a scorpion
to bite and kill him.

When Isis returns she finds Horus
lying lifeless in the dirt.
Set has killed her husband
and now her son.
Isis looking at Horus, chants magical words
and brings him back to life.
Horus was a dead god
and now he is an alive god.
Unjustly killed he is brought back to life.

This too sounds familiar, doesn't it?



Since Isis was able
to bring Horus back to life
they decide to find Osiris body
and resurrect him too.
Gods who are killed unfairly
are brought back to life.
You can see that this unjust killing of the gods
is well-known motif for
the ancient world.

Now, brought back to life,
Osiris feels the time has come
to deal with Set;
meaning, it is time to take revenge.
Osiris asked his son Horus,
“What is the most glorious deed a man can perform?”
Horus replies to his father,
“To take revenge
upon one who has injured
his father or mother.”²

Osiris likes Horus’ answer
and begins to teach him
how to use weapons of war.

Horus makes it his mission
to the track down Set
and eventually Horus captures
Set and defeats him.

² ibid

This is where it gets real:

Ready to avenge his death and his father's,
Horus raises his weapon
and Isis suddenly feels
compassion and pity toward Set
and so casts a spell,
which makes Horus drop his weapon
and allows Set to escape.

Consumed with rage
for letting the enemy getaway,
Horus yells at his mother in disbelief,
claiming Set is *evil beyond all imagining*.
And Horus in anger,
chops off her head.

This is no bedtime story friends.

The story of a god who was unjustly killed,
but is brought back to life.
We Christians aren't the first
to choose that theme
as our defining story.
Yet there is a huge difference in *our* story.

The world we live in
is the world of Osiris, Isis, Horus and Set.
A world of messy relationships,
of victories and defeats,
a world where fleeing from danger
into more danger
is the only option:
**a world where revenge is often
confused for justice.**

We think somehow the *just* thing to do
is the *right the wrong*;
make whatever has taken place,

whatever evil has stopped us in our path,
carry through and see
to the proper consequences.

Right?

Action, reaction.

Crime, punishment.

That is the way of our world.



This is the world the disciples knew too.

The Romans had *righted the wrong*.

Rise up and there will be consequences.

So the disciples flee from danger.

The disciples are huddled up together,

hiding in Jerusalem

on Easter morning

here at the beginning of our story.

They are hiding in fear

—the text says hiding for *fear of the Jews*.

But I don't think they are hiding

because they are scared of the Jews

—they themselves are Jews.

It may be true, that a mob

might have quickly formed

and shouted, *crucify him*,

but the nature of a mob
is that as quickly as it forms,
it breaks up.

A mob doesn't roam the streets
for days demanding change or justice,
a mob is creation of a particular
moment in time.

And I don't think the disciples
are fearful of the Jewish leaders:
we already know they don't have laws
that can arrest and crucify people.

The Jewish leaders weren't interested
in hunting down the remaining followers
of this Galilean rabbi/messiah;
Rome has done its job of sending a message.

The disciples might be fearful of the Romans,
but when John says
they are hiding for fear of the Jews,
I think, they are fearful
of one Jew in particular.

The one they had loved and respected.

The one they saw crucified.

The one they deserted.

The one who had been rumored
to have been brought back to life.

The god who had been unjustly killed
and was now resurrected.

The disciples knew
the way of the world.
They knew the stories
of righting the wrongs

and stories of heroes
who take matters
into their own hands.

At by this point they know
what they've done and
what they left undone.

I think these men were scared to death
of the revenge they thought
Jesus might take on them
for failing him.

Imagine the pain
of watching someone you loved
and were captivated by;
someone you adored and worshiped;
someone you put all your hope in;
someone you believed
could bring change and newness
to a world that desperately needed it
—imagine watching that person
be humiliated and killed
as an enemy of the state.

Imagine watching that person,
be beaten and mocked and crucified.
And then imagine the sinking feeling
of knowing *you deserted* the one you loved.
Imagine the guilt that would rise in your throat
as *you play back* your cowardice and confusion.

I don't blame the men
for not believing the women.
Perhaps that didn't want to believe them.

They saw Jesus heave
with his last breath.
They saw as his body
was removed from the cross
and put into the tomb.

Guilt ridden,
disappointed to the depths of who they are,
over the death of their god;
and disappointed in their own inability
to act courageously or to even understand
what he tried to tell them all along...

I don't blame them
for not believing or moreover *fearing*
the, *what if*;
what if they did believe the news
the women brought Easter morning:
the news that Christ had been
resurrected.

I don't blame them
for gathering in the city
behind locked doors for fear
of who might come looking for them.

The one who was dead and has returned
—this is a story they knew well.

What would Jesus say to them?
What would Jesus do to them?
What sort of justice
or revenge might Jesus want?



In 1992, Wayne Lo was 18 years old
and claimed that he was hearing commands

directly from God.³

He bought a SKS semiautomatic rifle
and ammunition over the phone
with his mother's credit card
and had them delivered to
Bard College at Simon's Rock in Massachusetts.

It was the first time he'd ever bought a weapon,
the first time he'd ever held a weapon,
the first time he'd fired a weapon.
He opened fire,
shooting at random and killed
one student, a professor
and wounded 4 others
before surrendering to police.

In the 20+ years since,
the father of Galen Gibson
the student who was killed,
has been interviewing people
and has been trying to understand
what happened
in hopes that others
would not have to live through what he has.

In 1999 Greg Gibson wrote a book called,
Gone Boy: A Father's Search for the Truth in His Son's Murder,
and he began receiving letters
from the one person he never talked to;
Wayne Lo.



This is from the introduction to Gibson's book,

³ the following story comes a Story Corps interview with Wayne Lo and Greg Gibson
<https://storycorps.org/stories/greg-gibson-and-wayne-lo-171208/>

But what about this matter of moving on, and the healing and forgiveness it implies?...Survival is the rule, not the exception, and I can't understand the "why" of it any more than I can understand why a cut heals over.

The idea of forgiveness is a greater mystery still—one I'll spend the rest of my life attempting to unravel. As it happens, I've got a helper in this endeavor, a strange sort of sidekick. His name is Wayne Lo and he's the man who murdered my son.

Wayne writes to me a few times a year, usually with a small check, which I deposit in the Galen Gibson Scholarship Trust. [Lo] earns the money by selling his artwork on the internet....

Society...has been very efficient about punishment, but backward about reconciliation and rehabilitation.

...There are endless branches on this journey, and no two people's experiences are ever the same. I hear a lot about what I "ought" to be doing and feeling and...I am often confronted by people who expect me to feel a certain way when, in fact, I do not feel that way at all.

Much of the time, I realize that what I'm really dealing with are people's own fears or their overwhelming desire to normalize what for them must be an unthinkable situation.

What is there to do but try to be honest with them, and keep on moving? If I've learned anything since Galen's death, it is simply to follow my heart, regardless of the expectations that surround me.⁴

⁴ from the Story Corps website, taken from *Gone Boy*, by Gregory Gibson, North Atlantic Books, 2011



How do you think
the disciples tried to normalize
their unthinkable situation?
I think hiding was their first instinct.
Flee from danger.
I think fear was their survival mode.

But that isn't where the story stops.

I'm beginning to come to a place
where if we as people of faith are satisfied
at only the announcement
of Jesus's resurrection
we are only telling half of the story.

The resurrection was a decisive victory over death.
A bold claim by the God of everything
that sin and death
are not the end of who we are.

But when Jesus comes through the locked doors
—doors that were locked
because I believe the disciples
were scared to find out
what a resurrected Jesus might do
—when Jesus comes through those locked doors
and comes through that fear
and speaks forgiveness and peace
—we are confronted with a new theme,
a new motif in which the story is told.

Our story of a god
who is unjustly killed
and is raised from the dead,
is a truth that our God does not
seek revenge or crush those
who are *evil beyond all imagining*.

Our story is of a God
rising from the grave
who does not wield a sword,
but who speaks with the sword of his mouth;
declaring peace and restoration.
Christ breaks the cycle of violence
and that is Easter every time it happens
right here and right now.

The first thing Jesus says
to those fearful followers is,
“peace be with you.”
It is not what they were expecting.
It is not what the world is expecting.

Just as Greg Gibson pointed out
everyone expects him to feel and act a certain way
about an unthinkable situation.

We are not expecting
the father of a murdered son to say,
*forgiveness is a mystery I will never fully understand
but I have a sidekick helping me
and he is the murderer of my son;*
that is the Easter event;
**a death and resurrection
that rewrites the story.**

It's not that the Jews didn't have
forgiveness and peace
before Jesus's resurrection.

But because Jesus stands
at the center of the Christian stage
—**our** witness to the Easter miracle

means we cannot separate the action
of his defeat of sin and death
from the reaction
of peace and forgiveness
that the resurrection demands.

Because we follow his witness,
we are unable to separate
the Christian life—*grounded in death and resurrection*
from the power of breaking
the cycle of violence and revenge.

Jesus' command to his disciples
in receiving the Holy Spirit,
is they too show the world
that same forgiveness and peace
therefore breaking the cycle
and changing the narrative.

I love how Eugene Peterson's *The Message*
translates these verses,

“Then [Jesus] took a deep breath
and breathed into them.
“Receive the Holy Spirit,” he said.
“If you forgive someone's sins,
they're gone for good.
If you don't forgive sins,
what are you going to do with them?” (Jn.20:22-23)

What a miracle.

If you hold onto someone's sins;
what will you do with them?
If you are unable to come to forgiveness,
what will that do to you?

Maybe that is why the Sunday after Easter
always includes this story.

We go back to that morning,
not to hear that Christ is risen

but to hear what resurrection
must then mean
in our lives.

The continuation of the Easter story
allows even fearful disciples,
even doubtful disciples,
who might have expected a god
who was ready to *right their wrongs*,
even they are given the chance
to see that way this god
rights the wrongs
is to hold out scarred hands
and declare peace and forgiveness.

This is a mystery we may never fully understand.
But it is a power that we are called into,
a power let loose in the world.