

## A Different Kind of Joy

*Theologian and podcaster Kate Bowler frames Easter as a feast of joy that doesn't erase the pain that has come before it:*

Easter is the season of joy.

The alleluias return. The story reaches its turning point. Death does not get the last word.

Joy brings us incredible, brief, soul-filling moments when we feel the overwhelming love of God and our place in this world. Our soul cries: Yes. I am grateful. It is so good to be alive.

But that is not the only way joy shows up.

There is an aspect of joy we often miss around Easter, and it appears precisely when Easter comes and goes and life remains ... unfinished. We wake up the next morning and discover that we are still carrying the same griefs, the same unanswered prayers, the same ache we carried throughout Lent.

This can feel confusing. Shouldn't we feel better? Was Easter not enough?

But Easter joy is not the feeling that everything has been fixed. It is not happiness, resolution, or emotional closure. Easter joy is the ability to live in Christian anticipation and trust—patiently and imperfectly—even while we remain here in the long middle.

Joy is one of the most powerful experiences we can have because it is an emotion that can co-exist with our actual lives. Unlike happiness, joy can live alongside sadness, boredom, fear, or despair. It expands our capacity to hold contradictory truths at the same time—and because we know joy, we recover a strange, steady confidence that life is still worth loving, even when it hurts.

Scripture is honest about this. Jesus weeps at Lazarus's tomb, even knowing resurrection is coming. Paul speaks of being "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" [2 Corinthians 6:10]. Revelation [21:4] promises a future where God will wipe away every tear—but that promise is not the same thing as pretending we are not crying now.

This is where Easter joy lives.

It is not joy instead of grief. It is joy with grief. Not joy that rushes us forward, but joy that allows us to remain human in the meantime.... This joy is more totalizing than optimism. It is truer than plain happiness. It is the deep assurance that the story is not finished, even when our lives feel painfully incomplete.

Easter joy is the grace of being able to say: This is hard. I am still waiting. And God is still good.

*Edited from :Kate Bowler, "A Different Kind of Joy," for Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations (CAC Publishing, 2026).*