This is the Mystery of Easter

Story by Amelia Richardson Dress
Illustrated by Lilly J. Moore
DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the children who teach us how to take scripture seriously.
May we all love this story enough to wrestle with it, play with it and live it.
There was once a man who loved big enough to change the world.

People knew he was in God and God was in him.
Everywhere he went, people would ask him, “What’s the best way to live?” This man, whose name was Jesus, would answer:
LOVE

LOVE GOD

LOVE YOURSELF

LOVE EVERYONE ELSE
Now there were some people who didn’t like what Jesus was teaching. They did not want to be told to love God, love themselves and love everyone else. It’s a very hard thing to love that big.
Instead of learning this hard thing, they decided to have Jesus killed.

This is the hard part of the story. When we tell this part of the story we always say, “This is not the end of the story.”
The hard part of the story is that Jesus' enemies did not want to learn to Love, so they had Jesus killed on a cross. The cross reminds us of a very sad thing.
Jesus’ friends, the ones who knew that he was in God and God was in him, were very sad. They remembered how they felt when Jesus was around, like God was with them, too.

Their hearts were broken.
Jesus’ friends put him in a tomb, which was like a cave, and they used a big stone for the door.
Then they took some time to cry and hug and to try to fix their broken hearts.
Later, several of Jesus’ friends went to the tomb where he was buried. Sometimes, when you’re very sad because someone has died, it helps to visit their grave. The tomb was like a grave, and Jesus’ friends were very sad.
When they got there, they discovered that the huge, huge stone that had been blocking the entrance was out of the way.
Inside, they saw a man dressed in a white robe who said to them:

Do not be afraid.

You’re sad but here is Good News. Jesus is alive again.

This is a mysterious story.
This is the story that changes the cross.

It still reminds us of a sad thing but now it also reminds us of a good, important thing. Now it reminds us that no matter what happens, no matter how hard things are, we are with God and God is with us.
This is the secret to
loving God,
loving yourself and
loving everyone else.
God is always with You 🧡
About the Author

Amelia Richardson Dress is a United Church of Christ pastor, writer, parent, spouse and fierce advocate for children. She’s a frequent contributor to publications covering education, spirituality and parenting. This is her first picture book, a passion project that grew out of her work doing theology with children. Sign up for her newsletter or learn more about upcoming projects at ameliadress.com.

About the Illustrator

Lilly Moore is a Comic Book Artist/Illustrator who studied at Southern Oregon University. She spent four years teaching in Japan and learning about illustration in Japan and Korea. She loves teaching, drawing and design and hates having her picture taken. Her work can be found at lillyjmoore.com.
Scripture References

Love God, love yourself, love others
Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Leviticus 19:18
He was in God and God was in him
John 1:1-14, John 10:30-38

People would ask him, “what’s the best way to live?”

Jesus’ ministry was spent teaching, healing and generally loving people deeply. The questions came in all forms, but at their root, this is what people were seeking. With an older child, or for a personal study, it would be interesting to read through one of the gospels and make note of the questions people asked Jesus!

The empty tomb


God is always with you

Deuteronomy 31:6, Joshua 1:9

About this Book

This book was not originally a book at all. In the beginning, it was a story told simply, with a rock, a cross and a few pictures printed off the internet. It came about because, as a pastor and a parent, I needed a better way to talk to kids about Easter and there’s no way to talk about Easter without also talking about the crucifixion. Many curricula, books and children's sermons reduce the Easter story to an object lesson that emphasizes the horror of the cross, a lesson that is somehow meant to reassure kids that God loves them.

What if, instead of all that, we simply let the story speak for itself?
As I prepared to tell this story this way, I took into it all the questions children (and adults!) often ask about Easter:

Why do we have a cross hanging in our church if the cross was a bad thing?

Why did Jesus die?

Who killed Jesus?

Did God want Jesus to die?

In addition, I wanted to take seriously the sadness and grief of the crucifixion story. In the U.S., we are a culture that often does not handle death openly, which means kids and adults alike do not know how to sit with the profound sadness of the death of a loved one. Yet, this central story of our faith provides a framework for the raw, painful work of grief. So, I added an implied question:

How do we act after someone dies?

These are not simple questions and they are not simple answers. But they are important questions, and when kids are encouraged to ask them honestly and inspired to explore them deeply, they draw closer to God.

That’s why the illustrations in this book, though beautiful, are simple. It’s also why some of the most important parts are not illustrated at all. Some things cannot be seen, they can only be experienced—and lived.

Although I love this book the way you love something you’ve poured much time and energy into, it was first written for storytelling and that is still my favorite way to tell it. The original children’s sermon and instructions are on my website at ameliadress.com/easterstory.

Easter blessings to you. May you know always that God is with you,

Amelia