



**Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24;
1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Mark 16:1-8
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (March 31, 2024)**

One Life is a 2023 biographical drama film directed by James Hawes. It is based on the true story of Sir Nicholas (Nicky) Winton, a British businessman in Prague who figured out how to help groups of Jewish children in German-occupied Czechoslovakia to hide and flee in 1938–39, just before the beginning of World War II. The credits say 6,000 people owed their lives to Winton.

Similarly, the 1993 **Schindler's List** is an historical drama film directed and produced by Steven Spielberg and written by Steven Zaillian. The film follows Oskar Schindler, a German industrialist who saved more than a thousand mostly Polish–Jewish refugees from the Holocaust by employing them in his factories during World War II.

For the saved lives, thanks be to God.¹

How many owe our lives to Christ?

Growing up, I couldn't wait for Lent along with Winter to be over with. With Spring and new leaves on trees and then pretty flowers and the return of the swallow, I knew we would soon celebrate Easter, the annual recurrence of a feast day marked by fancy dresses, family gatherings, and abundant banquets.

¹ [Rescue and Resistance | Holocaust Encyclopedia \(ushmm.org\)](https://ushmm.org)

I knew Easter was an important day because there was so much happiness and festivity in the air. It was a day of celebration.

When adults explained to me that we were celebrating Jesus risen from the dead, I didn't require much explanation. It was a matter of fact.

When I came to a deeper understanding of the sacrifice of Jesus and his Resurrection, I began to appreciate the whole story in a more personal way.

On **Holy Thursday**, after the celebration of the Passover meal during which Jesus offered bread and wine as his body and blood and washed his disciples' feet, Jesus goes out to pray but this time he brings along the disciples.

Together, they walk through hill-side vineyards and Jesus tells them he is the vine, and they are the branches, and they need to stay strictly connected to him if they are to bear much fruit (John 15:1-5).

The night proves to be a dreadful one. Deep in prayer, Jesus agonizes in the garden of Gethsemane at the thought of what is about to happen, yet he trusts the enduring presence of God and God's power to save. He commits himself to carry on the will of the Father.

Temple guards and a mob of people led by Judas come to arrest Jesus to take him to the High Priest of the Sanhedrin for a mock trial where they couldn't come up with real charges. In the courtyard, that very night, Peter denies to even know Jesus not once but three times.

Then, Jesus is taken to see the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, who finds no fault with him. At the Governor's headquarters, the

same mob requests that he be crucified. Jesus is condemned to death, then, stripped of his clothes, flogged, mocked, and humiliated. A crown of thorns is put on his head.

That leads to early morning on **Friday**: Jesus is forced to carry his own cross through the streets of Jerusalem all the way to “the Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha” where is crucified between two other people (were they criminals or freedom fighters? John doesn’t say – John 19:18).

His mother, Mary, a few other women, and the disciple he loved were there, distraught at witnessing the agony and the horrible suffering of the body of Jesus whom they love so much.

All the rest of his disciples abandoned him as trouble started. They wouldn’t be caught near him now. The terror is palpable.

Who really wants to stop and contemplate on the misery of the cross on which hangs a tortured, ripped, beaten-to-a-pulp body, spit-covered, and “marred beyond human likeness”?² His mission seemed a total failure and utter humiliation, deposited with him in an empty tomb. The powers of evil turn out to be overwhelmingly stronger and virtually unstoppable.

Then, **Sunday** rolls around with the news of his Resurrection.

Those opposed to his message had succeeded in silencing him but for a short time. Though he was tortured and killed as a criminal and an enemy of the state, and his murder justified as a necessary act of public defense and divine wrath, Jesus rose by the righteousness and faithfulness of God’s eternal Word.

In the resurrection, God affirmed the Word-made-flesh (John 1:14) to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).

² Isaiah 53:1-12. See also Zechariah 12:10.

Just as in our current reality, it is normal to feel powerless to the death dealing ways of the world. In the face of so much violence around us, in the presence of so much hatred, so much non-sensical cruelty for personal gain, so much lust for power, we, believers in the Risen One, fall still silent, captive to fear, confused, and guilt ridden.

Much like the women at the tomb, we walk around expecting death in this dying world.

The women have seen Jesus suffer and die, being placed into a tomb, and sealed with a heavy stone. They are ready to deal with a cold, stiff body, and honor it with spices accepting the responsibility of masking death's odor. Will their act of piety sooth their sense of powerlessness?

As they approach the tomb, the women wonder how the stone will be rolled away, but as they lift their gaze they see that someone has already taken care of this overwhelming obstacle for them. They rush in and have an unexpected encounter with a young man dressed in white. They are no doubt perplexed and confused, maybe even afraid that someone has stolen the body and that their friend will not be able to have a proper burial.

The young man tells them not to be alarmed: Jesus is no longer there because he has risen. See, the tomb is empty!

How can they *not* be alarmed? Less than 48 hours ago they watched in horror as Jesus was taken down from the cross. Has his body been stolen? Taken to another location? Have they any control over the situation, can they give him a proper burial?

They have seen death. They are familiar with death. And they expect death and are ready to deal with it. What is this resurrection business? Can one hope against all hope?

Isn't this what we experience two thousand years later?

We move on from what we perceive to be sticky social situations. We walk away, tight-lipped and eyes-lowered, afraid of believing in and suggesting a different way of life filled with understanding and compassion. We avoid hot topics that might require solidarity and advocacy for fear of offending people.

Who wants conflict? Who wants to upset others and risk being shunned by friends or family members?

The women have heard the strange announcement of Jesus being risen. This sounds like bad timing. Why couldn't God wait for them to raise Jesus? Wouldn't it be easier for us if we could see Jesus simply appear?

But no, we come to the Easter event with the same thing these women had, a word about resurrection that flies in the face of everything that we know to be true.

Who would need to experience in faith what can be affirmed by the senses? Would we need to trust God if we can trust our own sight? Would a physical experience of the resurrection permit spiritual freedom? Spiritual growth? Closeness with God?

The women's initial experience of this news of resurrection is unsettling and quite understandably so. The hope of the resurrection does not come naturally, it does not emerge instantly.

It's normal to feel unsettled and disoriented when hearing about the resurrection. How can it not be? After all, with the news of the resurrection, the single most constant reality of life - death - is no longer a constant.

What does it take to move past that trembling, to believe the unbelievable and be free?

The original ending of the gospel according to Mark makes sense from a human development perspective. We live with this unsettling news, and silence about the resurrection is our way of coping with fear.

Our hope is to grow in faith and trust. The Word-made-flesh has come to bring life and light to the world. John the Baptist testified about him: “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”³ To the curious, Jesus bids “Come and see.”⁴ Jesus’ encouragement is to look at the one that was lifted up⁵ and receive life in abundance.⁶

Can we trust that death has no more power over us? Can we live life fear-free?

Let us progress in faith. Let us live with the resurrection hope. Let us embrace in faith and freedom the liberating news of the resurrection. This is the hope the world needs to receive. Amen.

³ John 1:29

⁴ John 1:39

⁵ John 3:14; 8:28

⁶ John 10:10