Culture



Apple TV+'s original comedy series "Shrinking," starring Jason Segel as a grieving therapist, ended its first season on March 24. (Apple TV+ photo)



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"Shrinking," the hit new Apple TV+ show starring Jason Segel, Jessica Williams and Harrison Ford, is a lot of things. It's a story about making sense of grief with humor. It's a story about deepening relationships in a world tempted to stay on the surface. It's a story about second chances, new opportunities and not letting the past dictate the future.

It’s a story about resurrection, rebirth and new life. "Shrinking," I think, is an Easter story.

I hear what you’re saying. "But Eric, I watched that show. There's not an ounce of religion in it. No one rises from the dead. And there's nary a chocolate rabbit to be found."

To that I say, I hear you. But stick with me.

This is how the show begins: Segel's character, Jimmy, is blasting music, doing drugs and swimming with strippers. The commotion understandably wakes up his next door neighbors; it’s 3 o’clock in the morning, after all, and Jimmy's pool is just under their bedroom window.



Jason Segel and Jessica Williams play friends and co-workers in "Shrinking." (Apple TV+ photo)

Liz, played by Christa Miller, draws the short straw and must go out and confront her wayward neighbor.

It's a funny scene. Jimmy is rightly reprimanded, and Liz returns to bed. But this single moment encapsulates so much of where our characters are at the beginning of the show: distracted, disconnected, drowning in their own inner stuff.

In that moment, you wouldn't even know Liz and Jimmy have been neighbors — dare we say, friends — for a long time. Here's a guy who is so consumed with his own struggles that he's blinded to his impact on others. Here's a woman who — despite being able to very nearly see inside Jimmy's house from her own — is unable to reach Jimmy where it matters, to see what's really going on inside him.

We learn quickly that Jimmy's wife, Tia (Lilan Bowden) died in a tragic, sudden accident. Jimmy has spent the intervening year drowning in his grief. He's not been present to his teenage daughter, Alice (Lukita Maxwell); he's avoided his best friend, Brian (Michael Urie).

And his professional life as a therapist is less than fulfilling. Jimmy, numb to his own pain, has grown frustrated, jaded in helping others work through theirs.

"We know what they should do," he insists to his colleagues. "Don’t you ever want to just shake them?" So, Jimmy starts being more directive in his therapy practice — much to the chagrin of his colleagues, Paul (Harrison Ford) and Gaby (Jessica Williams).

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It's not lost on the viewer, of course, that Jimmy can't take his own advice — or that of anyone else. Many of his friends, neighbors and colleagues have been telling

Jimmy this, showing him what he needs to do to muddle through his grief. They point to his crumbling relationship with his daughter; they highlight the jeopardy in which he's placed his career.

But none of that matters. That's not how these things work. To riff on the show's theme song "Frightening Fishes" — we have to help one another carry the weight that's dragging us down. We can't simply offer directives.

And that's why "Shrinking" is an Easter story.

I've heard it said Jesus died an individual and rose a community. It was through Jesus' death and resurrection that the church — the people of God — finds itself. And it's not easy. Mary Magdalene is alone and tearful in the garden; the apostles are locked away in the Upper Room; and at least two folks were on the road to Emmaus — walking the wrong way.

They were all drowning in their own inner stuff. They were all stumbling about in the dark, the light of their friend Jesus so brutally and suddenly extinguished.

And then: God’s big surprise, the resurrection. A complete reordering of our expectations, our relationships, the very purpose of our lives. Our horizons expand; our hope returns.

The risen Jesus brings people together. He walks with them as he walks with us, but also reminds us of the Christ light glowing within each and every person. The risen Christ calls us to community, makes us church and lifts our gaze upward to see more clearly the God who delights in us, who desires for us joy and peace and love.

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But the delta between Good Friday and Easter Sunday is the lamentation and quiet suffering of Holy Saturday. It is necessarily a journey that begins within ourselves, our own deepening awareness of our own stuff, and then extends outward. It's unfolding, slowly, constantly, an ever-expanding invitation to encounter the risen Christ in joy — first in self, then in others.

One of the final scenes of "Shrinking" first season is a wedding. Our story that began in the sorrow of one man's lost love ends in the celebration of love found and

commitment made between two others. And the joy is clear: All of our characters — Jimmy, Gaby, Paul, Alice, Liz — are there. They're all dancing and singing and acting joyful.

Because they are no longer strangers to one another. They’re not perfect; season two will inevitably have conflict. But these "resurrected" people are on the road together, helping one another carry the weight that otherwise would have dragged them down.

The grief of death has been transformed into the joy of a people that has come together.