

Easter morning
April 21, 2019

All Saints Church
Year C

Isaiah 65:17-25
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Acts 10:33-43
John 20:1-18

Alleluia. Christ is Risen. The Lord is Risen, indeed. Alleluia.

This week, during Holy Week, right after our 7:30 am Morning Prayer service in the Lady's Chapel, a couple of folks employed by All Saints to prepare the grounds here at the church, during post-winter, pre-warm-spring, wanted to look into the church. Ann Lammers and Audrey White, two of our leaders for Morning Prayer, invited them in, to look around. They were awed. They particularly loved the Rose Window.

"Is that like the one that we saw on the news last night as we watched Notre Dame burn?"

"Well, maybe not as glorious and large, but yes a Rose Window, it is, with its beautiful light."

"We're so sorry the cathedral burned down, and we are so glad to be here with you now."

An Easter moment, in the middle of Holy Week... where the Christ, the power of connections, empathy, and hope, shines through in a simple encounter between strangers.

Notre Dame, French for "Our Lady" refers to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and why we call our own Chapel, the Lady's Chapel. The stained glass windows tell her biblical story, as we so easily can relate to a mother loving and mourning and intervening on our behalf.

Amazing, in the midst of such a patriarchal, male-dominated society, the Resurrection Story is told from the women's perspective. The Marys of the gospel tell the story... Mary, the mother of James, Mary Magdalene, the Apostle to the apostles, and Mary of Mary and Martha. Martha has her part as well. It's the women to whom Jesus reveals himself.

Early in the pre-dawn, while it is still dark, Mary Magdalene walks to the tomb by herself. The darkness of the morning only mirrors the darkness of her despair, her heaviness, her loneliness, and her grief.

I know that the text tells us that she goes to anoint Jesus, but I have a difficult time thinking that's what she's doing. She *knows* that there is a large stone between her and her Lord.

I imagine that she's walking to the grave, just to be as close to Jesus as she can be, even if it is to be outside the tomb, separated by a slab of rock. Maybe she sees herself rubbing the stone with her tears, with her hair, with her oils, pressing up against the rock, just to feel some release from her agony?

Can't we all identify with the need to be released from worries, anxieties, anger, shame, regret and deep sadness? Sometimes the pain is so great, we don't have a container large enough to

hold it, and we feel like a stranger to our own body, beyond our limits, maybe beside ourselves, out of sync, disoriented, numb and confused. We hope to wake up from a bad dream.

We've lost a child, a spouse, a parent, a job, a marriage, our health, and with that loss, a way forward; our hopes for the future eviscerated. Or we've made a mistake and we've lost our good name. We react detached from our essential goodness, feeling empty.

Or we've betrayed someone, like a kiss of death, maybe to have lost a friendship forever. Or we're standing with a crowd of strangers as tears stream down our faces, and we watch the Cathedral of Norte Dame burn against the night sky. (Or when churches get bombed in Sri Lanka as they did this Easter morning). Disasters are everywhere.

The night before the dawn is sometimes the most difficult of times to be in agony. Too deafening in its quietude, we can't sleep. Too full of our own racing thoughts, we wander around seeking solace. We feel inside out.

When I was a child, struggling with my parents' instability, afraid, I use to wander around the house like a ghost, while everyone was sleeping, and then lay down next to the embers of the fire, slowly dying, and take some solace in the cinders' flickering light.

Mary is wandering in the middle of the night, before the dawn, with a destination, but it matters not. She is lost.

As she arrives and sees that the stone is rolled away, she assumes that a gravedigger has stolen the body of her beloved. Of course, that makes sense, as a gravedigger has been digging away at her own soul, as well.

As the Apostle to the apostles, Mary runs home to tell Simon Peter and John what she discovered: Jesus is gone. She has no idea, but Easter is dawning.

After hearing her news, Simon Peter and John race ahead, get to the tomb, stick their heads in to see the burial clothes strewn on the floor, and are confused. The narrator confides in us, "as of yet, they did not understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead." Then the text reveals that the two men go home. A strange detail, but then this is not the men's story.

It's Mary's.

Weeping, Mary returns to the tomb. So convinced that someone has stolen Jesus' body, that even the sight of angels does not move her. To her they are just men. She responds to their questions with great anxiety.

Not only does she not know where they have laid Jesus, she does not know where she is, either.

And then, finally, Jesus speaks to her. "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?"

Mary thinks he is the gardener. In a sense, Jesus is her gardener, as he has planted the seeds of love and passion and delight and hope within her very soul.

And then Jesus breaks through her darkness by calling her name, “Mary.”

And then everything becomes clear. She sees. There, in that seeing, dawns the light of faith. Jesus tells her not to hold onto the Jesus she knew. To cling to the earthly Jesus is have faith based on signs only, which is not enough. In other words, the resurrection is not about proof. Not about a few burial clothes strewn on the floor.

This Lent, as almost a side comment from one of my favorite scholars, Richard Rohr, I heard from him in a podcast, “the reason Mary confused Jesus with the gardener, is that whom she truly sees is a gardener. It’s a gardener in the garden! Not Jesus. What she sees is the Christ shining through the gardener.”

Rohr’s comment changed my Lent forever; my Easter as well. It makes so much sense!

In the tomb, Mary has come alive before our very eyes. She is seeing the Divine in a new way. Jesus is ascending, leaving the God-dwelling Christ within the gardener, within her, within the burial clothes strewn on the floor..... and within all of us. In absence, she is seeing presence.

The Christ is everywhere, in everything, is the visible outpouring of God’s spirit, the unifying heartbeat of the World. Time and Space exploding into being. Love. Alive, never to know death, ever. Incarnation and Resurrection are everywhere! We just need to see it.

Two men walk on the road to Emmaus, and the Christ is there in the stranger. As they hear the salvation story, the Christ is there. As they break bread and drink wine, the Christ is there in their ordinary meal. As they huddle afraid in the Upper Room, the presence of Christ joins them. As a man cooks fish on the beach, the Christ is there.

Can you see it; can you feel it; can you trust it? That is... the ordinary is the extraordinary.

Jesus comes to the women. Typical, because Jesus is always seeking out the lost, the last, the least, and the littlest. Of course, he appears to the women first. He’s most comfortable with those who live on the fringe. Yet, maybe Jesus comes to the women first, because it’s those without power and prestige, who will be able to see the Indwelling of the Christ.

The possibility of seeing the Christ mirrored in all that we do, we need to trust that by falling we will rise, by risking we will find, and by giving we will receive. The first shall be last. The poor will be blessed. Even when it hurts, loving is the way.

See with a third eye, trusting where God seems most absent, God is nearest.

The Incarnation and the Resurrection is everywhere; foundational to our lives. We just have to believe it. It takes a lot of courage, a lot of trust, a lot of dying to our small ego self. And yet,

when we give our lives over to the Jesus-way of living, we receive the most amazing gift, maybe even the gift to the Universe.

It is there, in the despairing darkness, at the midnight of gloom, in a tomb too full, in the hell of someone's making, buoyed up by the Living Spirit, you will be able to light a candle and say to the night, "I beg to differ."

We have the eternal gift of Incarnation and Resurrection, which is the Living Spirit of a Loving God calling out our name. Come, look and see!

Alleluia. Christ is Risen. The Lord is Risen, indeed. Alleluia.