

Resurrection of the Lord - April 9, 2023 – Easter Sunrise

John 20:1–10 (11–18)

“Outside the Tomb”

1. My family has a family plot in a cemetery in Monterrey Mexico, my hometown.
 - a. There we have buried my maternal grandfather, my father and now recently my mother.
 - b. Prior to her death, mom went to that cemetery every so often, on special dates
 - i. She’d bring fresh flowers on dad and gradpa’s birthdays, on teacher’s day or on Day of the Dead
 - c. She found comfort going there.
 - d. It made her feel like she was doing right by them
 - e. Of course, she knew it was only their physical remains which were in that place.
 - f. She knew “they” weren’t there any more, but still, it made her feel close to them being there
2. Our story today is of a woman going to the place where her beloved teacher had been buried, to feel close to him.
 - a. It is a little confusing that we have slightly different versions of what happened that Easter morning in each of the four gospels in our scriptures.
 - i. Each version has unique elements.
 1. In all of them we know that Jesus had been buried in a tomb with a large stone rolled to cover its entrance
 2. We know that female and male disciples discovered his body was not there.
 3. And we know heavenly messengers declared about Jesus “he’s risen” or have a conversation with the disciples.
 - ii. Only one character is identified by name in every one of the versions.
 1. Mary Magdalene (Sorry, that’s kind of a trick question: Jesus is named in three, but referred to by title in one– Son of Man).
 2. Anyway, all the writers agreed Mary Magdalene was there (in some she had other women with her, in some she’s there alone), and by each naming her they are giving her a unique place in the narrative.
 3. Mary Magdalene has a different focus depending on which gospel we read
 - a. whether to prepare the body for burial (with spices etc. because the burial had been a rushed job because the sabbath was approaching)
 - b. or to mourn her friend and teacher, as in today’s passage.
 4. There is one more detail about Mary Magdalene in these stories.

- a. In two gospels she went into the tomb to see for herself that Jesus' body was not there.
 - b. In the other two when she didn't go in, looking at the tomb from the outside, she actually met Jesus outside the tomb. Alive.
- b. In today's passage, Mary Magdalene is overcome with grief.
 - i. Her eyes are so filled with tears, that reality itself is blurry, dark, messy.
 - ii. Discovering the open tomb, she ran to tell the disciples and then returned to grieve even more
 - iii. Mary Magdalene is on the outside looking in.
 - 1. This is tragedy upon tragedy.
 - 2. Her teacher was executed by the state.
 - 3. Now here was a tomb empty
 - iv. In that painful moment, she doesn't notice the surreal detail that two people are talking with her from inside the tomb
 - 1. They were sitting where the body of Jesus had been laid and they asked an odd question: Why are you weeping?
 - 2. Mary, in her grief, still had a clear sense of logic
 - a. Mary was worried about the body. The dead body.
 - b. You see, Jesus had not owned a tomb!
 - c. Someone had allowed his body to be placed here in this nearby tomb in a rush, because following the crucifixion the sabbath was starting at sundown.
 - d. Maybe the tomb owner had changed his mind and had taken him away?
 - 3. From the outside, looking in, it felt to her to be the only logical option.
 - 4. That's when Jesus appears to her, only she at first doesn't recognize him
 - a. Jesus asks her why she's weeping and who she's looking for.
 - b. And Mary figures it's the gardener, maybe he took Jesus away
 - c. And she says "I'll take his body (and I'll bury him properly)"
 - v. Jesus then simply uses her name: Mary
 - vi. Mary Magdalene, as if waking from a bad dream, yells out "Teacher!" If she had been sitting, and Jesus had been there standing, it would make sense that she turned to grab a hold of him, his feet or legs (that detail is in another of the gospels retelling of the story).

- vii. Maybe it sounds like Jesus is dismissive of Mary here, but I hear it more like a refocusing of the situation: Don't hang on to me, Mary. I have work to do and so you do...
3. As believers on Easter morning, we too are outside the tomb. And the tomb is empty.
- a. Our faith teaches us that death did not have the last word, that God raised Jesus to vindicate Jesus who had been unjustly executed, and in an ultimate act of solidarity with us humans who constantly face harm and threat of harm
 - b. Mary Magdalene is one of us. She is committed and is connected to Jesus.
 - c. And she takes her role seriously, both as a follower, but at this moment even more as the first to declare Jesus was alive.
 - d. If Jesus implied that Mary had work to do, so do we have work to do
 - e. We share in faith that our God is a God of love and mercy
 - f. We share in faith that Jesus is Immanuel, God with us
 - g. And with our lives and our words, we share that Jesus is with us, even when we find ourselves grief stricken and looking desperately for hope.
 - h. Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/resurrection-of-our-lord/commentary-on-john-201-18-15>

Easter - April 9, 2023

9:00 and 11:00 am

Matthew 28:1–10

“New Life Means Not Being Afraid”

1. When I share the Christmas story with the children of our preschool, I have them repeat two phrases so they can remember the story.
 - a. “Don’t be afraid!” “God loves you!”
 - b. The first is something which angels appearing to humans seem to say as first meeting: “Don’t be afraid!”
 - c. The second is the meaning I hope the children will carry with them about the joyous holiday of Christmas. “God loves us!”
 - d. “Don’t be afraid!” “God loves you!”
2. My apologies if it seems like I’m about to recycle a sermon (a Christmas sermon for Easter, at that!)
 - a. but it’s hard to overlook the parallel of an angel (translated here as messenger, the literal translation of the word) and even Jesus saying to two women: “Don’t be afraid!”
3. This year as we have been using the Women’s Lectionary for the Whole Church, we have been trying to center the experience of women in the Bible so we see the journey of faith through their eyes.
 - a. And so, in this passage, what do we see?
 - b. Let’s just start here:
 - i. We see two faithful disciples of Jesus who aren’t backing down.
 1. Not at the shocking experience of an earthquake.
 2. Not at the surprising appearance of a heavenly messenger.
 3. Not at the dramatic discovery of an empty tomb.
 - ii. Goodness! Even the brawny Roman guards collapsed like dead men!
 1. But not the women.
 2. These women carry an unshakeable faith which, even if they’re in the midst of attempting to understand an incomprehensible scene at the garden tomb,
 3. they aren’t fainting like damsels in distress, they aren’t running away.
 - iii. And the heavenly messenger opens up with “Fear not!”
 1. “Don’t be afraid”
 2. And he gives them the good news which brings us here this Sunday and every Sunday:
 3. That Jesus has been raised from the dead – in other words, we’re entering completely new territory here.
 4. Life isn’t going to be the same from here on out.

- c. Again, focusing on the women in the story, notice that THEY are tasked with being the first to proclaim that good news.
 - i. I know some Christian traditions do not ordain women as preachers, but c'mon--- here they are the first preachers proclaiming the most important sermon ever!
 - d. And it's off to the races.
 - i. They are running with hearts overflowing (they carry fear and joy!)
 - ii. A few steps into their sprint to tell the rest of the disciples, they encounter Jesus.
 - iii. Again, Jesus appears first to the women before anyone else!
 - iv. And Jesus, first offering them a greeting of peace, echoes the heavenly messenger. Fear not.
4. Fear not.
- a. Easier said than done.
 - i. Fear not – tell that to a new parent watching their newborn sleep their first night at home...
 - ii. or that same parent years later as they deposit that same child at a college a few states away.
 - iii. Fear not – tell that to someone in the hospital waiting room as they prepare for their first chemo treatment...
 - iv. or to someone rebuilding their life after a tragedy.
 - b. The two Mary's in our story had fear, but the fear didn't stop them.
 - i. I would argue, in fact, if you can hold on to this paradox with me: I would argue they felt fear but acted fearlessly.
 - ii. Fear was in the air!
 - iii. The soldiers acted fearfully and collapsed.
 - iv. The women acted fearlessly and ran to proclaim the good news of new life!
 - c. But here fearlessness isn't bravado or certainty.
 - i. It's faithfulness at its best!
 - ii. The two Mary's take the heavenly messenger's word and they run (and likewise after the encounter with Jesus, they run)!
5. I think that taking in the message of Easter can't just be about the promise of heaven and new life then.
- a. The message of Easter is that, since death doesn't have the last word, there is new life here and now in surprising (even frightening) ways!.
 - b. To take that message deeply into our hearts we need God's gift of faith, and also God's gift of fearlessness.
 - c. What were the two phrases I asked the preschoolers to remember for Christmas?
 - i. Don't be afraid. God loves us.

- d. So I'm going to ask you to remember two phrases this Easter.
 - i. The first one is Act fearlessly.
 - ii. And the second one makes the first one possible: God loves us.
- 6. When living life is overwhelming... Act fearlessly (because) God loves us.
- 7. When we face negative consequences for advocating for those pushed to the margins ...
Act fearlessly (because) God loves us.
- 8. When we see progress in our work for justice... Act fearlessly (because) God loves us.
- 9. When we can proclaim that there is new life... Act fearlessly (because) God loves us.
- 10. Thanks be to God.