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John 20:1-18

That Morning

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NRSV - Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Christ the Lord is Risen. Christ the Lord is Risen Indeed. Today we are confident and joyful, but when we look at that first Easter morning they were filled with blame, doubt, and uncertainty. Mary, Simon Peter, and the other disciple think that someone has stolen Jesus’ body. The disciples go back home and Mary stays at the tomb crying. A man comes to talk with Mary and she thinks it is a gardener, but when Jesus calls her by name, she recognizes that it is Jesus.

When I was in 7th grade, which is a hard age to be anyway, my dad got me a plaque telling me the meaning of my name. The plaque said that my name Kerry meant darkness! I did not like that meaning and so I went searching and shopping until I found another plaque that said Kerry meant one who loves the light. I wasn't darkness; I was a lover of light! You see, it is all in the way you look at it. Darkness - lover of light, I choose lover of light!

It is when Mary is called by her name that she recognizes who Jesus is. Scripture tells us that God knows our name. Isaiah 43:1 “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.” Psalm 139 “O Lord, you have searched me and known me!” John 10:3 “The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” Jeremiah 1:5 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.”

When Mary sees the man that she assumes is the gardener, she pleads, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” She is so frantic to find Jesus’ body that it is all she can focus on. Sometimes we do that. We become so focused on our troubles, on our suffering, on our pain, we hold it so tight that we are unable to grasp the resurrected Lord. Mary prefers the anguish of seeing Jesus’ body again rather than the possibility of resurrection. When Jesus calls Mary by name, her eyes and her heart are opened to the presence of God. Brene Brown says “Christ’s voice is so compelling for me, I will follow at the risk of being wrong” . Mary hears that voice that she knows, that voice that she has come to love. And she is filled with relief and confusion. This man who she thought was the gardener is really Jesus....it is all in the way you look at it.

Resurrection, new life, it seems so unlikely, so distant, so far away. But it is near. It is here. We are like Mary, we are frantically searching for whatever shred of proof or foothold of new life we can find. But Easter tells us that what looks like the end might be the beginning. We have to remember that when we are in the sadness and the pain of Friday and Saturday, that Sunday is right around the corner.

This week we have had great tragedy in our neighborhood. Two men stole a car and while they were running from the police, they ran into another car and there was a horrible tragedy. Ethan Vasquez, a 7th grader at Travis, was killed. His mom remains in the hospital. Many of our youth knew Ethan and were his friend. One of our teachers taught Ethan when he was at Lakewood. My heart has just broken this week, thinking of the pain and anguish and despair that Ethan’s family is going through, and then I think of our youth here. Youth that we want to shelter from the pain of the world. Youth that we want to keep safe. Youth that have seen once again the evil that exists in our world and the suffering that results.

We Christians follow a Messiah that hungered, wept, and cried out in despair . Life is hard and faith helps us not escape it, but deal with it. There is never a point where we are without hope because God is in the business of bringing dead things back to life again .

God is love but love is hard, love is struggle, love is persevering through hardship. And we know as Christians that the only way to new life is through death. We have to open our heart to pain, to grief, to questioning, because if we run away, we might miss the resurrection. Resurrection is crazy and unexpected. New life in Christ is surprising. I think of my stepdad who has been sober for 30 years. When he attended his first AA meeting, it seemed like 30 years of sobriety was impossible. He knew that he could only do it with God, not on his own strength. And, he had to do it one day at a time, rejoicing in the success of each day.

I think of someone here who might feel like their life of faith has ended. Or someone here who feels like their relationship is over. Or someone here who feels like the happiness will never return to their life. We close ourselves off to the possibility of resurrection, to the possibility of new life. And when we are at our lowest, I invite us to stop, to listen for that still, small voice that is God calling our name.

There have been times in my life when I have felt distant from God. And I always remember that saying, “If you feel far from God, guess who moved?” I remember those moments when I would hear music or hear a baby cry or see a beautiful sunrise or get a phone call from a friend and I would move closer to God once again. Having a God of resurrection means that the story is seldom over when we think it is .

Did anyone see the photo essay from the New York Times a few weeks ago that was a project of reconciliation from Rwanda? 20 years after the conflict those who were imprisoned for war crimes and genocide could be released if their victims were willing to reconcile and the perpetrators were willing to admit their wrong and if both parties were willing to live a new life and do it together in some way. A woman rested her hand on the shoulder of the man who killed her father and brothers. A woman posed with a man who stole her property and whose father helped murder her husband and children. Hutu perpetrators were granted pardon by the Tutsi survivors of the crime.

Having a God of resurrection means that the story is seldom over when we think it is . It is God who can call us out of our tombs of doubt, hopelessness, fear, anxiety, depression, addiction. We just have to look at life in a new way. Remember, it is all in the way you look at it. May all who have lost faith, all who have walked in sadness, all who have given up hope remember the words that we affirm when we share in Holy Communion. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. Praise God, Amen.