

It is hard to see what we don't expect.

In January of 2007, in a subway station in Washington D.C., violin virtuoso Joshua Bell set up and played his 3.5 million dollar Stradivarius violin for about 45 minutes. Only 6 people stopped to listen, 20 threw him some change which added up to \$32. When he finished no one applauded. The few children who stopped to listen, were quickly hurried away by their parents.

People expected to see and hear an amateur musician playing in a subway, and so that was what they experienced.

On that dark morning in the pre-dawn hours, Mary did not expect to encounter Jesus. She was processing her profound grief that he had not only died, but now some malevolent characters had removed his body over night. Through her tears in the darkness, and the brokenness of her heart, she could not see that man she spoke to was Jesus.

This year is an Easter unlike any we have known. Even for those of us who have journeyed through other Easters with profound grief or pain, we have at least known the comfort of being able to gather, if we so chose.

This year there is a palpable heaviness in the air. For those of us in good health, we may say we have nothing to complain about, but we feel this grief none the less. Easter has come and we find ourselves peering around and looking for the joy.

It is hard to see what we don't expect. And what we expect is the usual - the choir singing Alleluia, the beautiful flowers on the altar, the fun of finding chocolate eggs hidden at church or at home, the warm greetings of friends and family.

We are, very much like Mary on that first day of Resurrection. Filled with sorrow and unaware of what we are staring straight in the face.

The Risen Lord.

Perhaps you've heard the longstanding joke between Wycliffe and Trinity Colleges at the University of Toronto. Wycliffe had a painting hanging in their main hall of the women coming to the tomb and the angel proclaiming to them, "He is not here!" It is said that some mischievous Trinity students put a note beside the painting that read, "because He is across the street at Trinity!"

As we proclaim the Risen Lord this day, we do not find our Easter Joy in the usual gathering and hymns, our prayers said in unison and our Alleluia's ringing out after our long fast. However, like Mary, Jesus speaks our name into the gloom of a day not fully realized.

Jesus is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!

And as he speaks our names anew this morning, let us open our eyes to our Risen Lord in ways we have perhaps not seen before.

Heartened by the international choir singing in isolation, together. Touched by the neighbours who have put their Christmas lights back up as a sign of hope and solidarity. Stirred by the raucous chorus of birds flying north when we get out for a walk. Warmed by the phone call from a friend - old or new. Grateful for the neighbour who brings us groceries. Blessed by the knowledge that our sisters and brothers are praying for us and with us.

Listen in the quiet of this unusual Easter morning, listen for the voice of the Risen Lord. When he speaks your name in love, your eyes will be opened to the Resurrected Life that cannot be held captive by death, by pandemic, by fear, by hopelessness.

I leave you with the beautiful words of Joyce Rupp "The Easter Challenge"
(from Out of the Ordinary)

You believe because you can see...

Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe. - John 20:29

Every year it happens:
Earth shakes her sleepy head,
Still a bit wintered and dull,
And feels new life stirring.

Every year cocoons give up their treasures,
Fresh shoots push through brown leaves,
Seemingly dead branches shine with green,
And singing birds find their way home.

Every year we hear the stories

Empty tomb, surprised griever,
Runners with news and revelation,
Unexpected encounters,
Conversations on the road,
Tales of nets filling with fish,
And breakfast on a seashore

And every year
The dull and dead in us
Meets our Easter challenge:

To be open to the unexpected,
To believe beyond our security, (*or, this year, beyond our insecurity*)

To welcome God in every form,
And trust in our own greening.

Amen.