

Karen Hollis
April 12, 2020
Easter Sunday
John 20:1-18

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts
be reflections of your word to us today, in Jesus' name we pray.
Amen

Day after day lately, I wake, say good morning to my beloved, maybe light a fire, make some tea and tidy the kitchen, make breakfast, read something in the Sounder while eating, feed Joy and get ready for the day. Even during holy week, the days just blurred together. On Friday I was watching a Good Friday video offering from a colleague in Nanaimo, and thinking how good it is to hear the story . . . how good it is to have a real reference point for my life when my schedule and surroundings fail to offer anything noteworthy. The story of Holy Week this year is a gift that offers context to this extraordinary time.

Easter is often a time set apart from the ordinary, where families gather for a long weekend of recreation that lifts us out of the everyday. We celebrate with liturgy, feast around a table, or a post-Easter vigil dance party. Things are different this year . . . the dance party with

Church of the Apostles in Seattle was online . . . we gather in smaller family units for dinner, probably connect with loved ones over zoom.

The thing that is unchanging is the truth we celebrate through the timeless words of the story; the story that meets us where we are, embraces the lives we are living and invites us in.

This morning we join Mary as, even in the depths of her grief, she finds the strength to get out of bed in the wee hours of the morning to anoint Jesus' body; she pulls open the wound of her grief as she walks through the garden toward the tomb. We're invited to stand with her as she watches the disciples observe the empty tomb she has already seen. We remain with her as she pours out her truth to the angels and to the resurrected Jesus whom she does not recognize.

It's a holy space where she expresses her truth. There is something about articulating our grief and fear that loosens the places they live inside of us. In hearing the vibration of the words enter the world, something shifts, and an opening is created for healing. It's in that moment of opening Mary hears her name in that familiar and unmistakable way.

One can imagine the transformation that happens within her in the seconds that follow, as Mary tries to locate herself in a reality where she truly could be hearing Jesus say her name. Even in that moment of transformation, Jesus doesn't take away the past.

Jesus doesn't take away the trauma and the grief of the previous 3 days, he doesn't take away cross or crucifixion, but in revealing himself to her, gives her a glimpse into the bigger picture, into the larger context of God's powerful love.

Like Mary, on this Easter Sunday, we are not asked to abandon our lives for the joy of this day, but to answer the invitation to bring our lives into God's story. We're invited to acknowledge all the ways in which the realities of the pandemic are sources of unrest in our lives. When we are unable to see our family in the flesh, the life-sustaining rhythms of our days are disrupted, family members laid off, loneliness and touch deprivation press in on us, as we watch the death toll rise and communities wilfully ignore warnings; when a global pandemic adds a layer of fear and complication to already emotionally

tense life situations such as illness or pregnancy, we are invited to, as a writer from Sojourners put it, "bring [these things to the garden], [pour] out our hearts, [explain] all the ways it shouldn't have to be like this. And like Mary, in the intimacy of our disappointment, may we hear Jesus call our name."¹

Jesus the resurrected Christ does not take these things away, but reveals that there is more to these realities and stories than we can possibly understand right now. Our stories fit into God's story in a perfect and wondrous way that is beyond our knowing; there is life beyond what we can see today. While we might close our computers after our worship service and return to our overly familiar surroundings, let us not forget that today is a new day; today Jesus lives, and that changes everything . . . however we may be suffering in this season, only God has the final word . . . and God has not finished speaking. Thanks be to God!

¹ Rebekah Bled from Sojourners Magazine