

## Sermon - Easter 2022

*By The Rev. Canon Dr. Lorne Mitchell*

Holy God, your Son Jesus Christ has risen this day!

Alleluia!

The powers of this world did their worst - but to no avail.

Alleluia!

Jesus, like the rising sun could not be held back from breaking forth like the dawn. **Amen!**

My wife, Karen and I, love getting up early in the morning while it's still dark and heading out to a country dirt road. As you look to the east over one of the huge fields of Perth County you can begin to see the sky getting lighter and lighter. The Sun is getting ready to rise. The thing about that moment is that nothing in this world can stop it from rising. Not wars; not pandemics; not famine; not loss or suffering or heartache... nothing can stop it from rising and breaking forth with it's light and warmth.

Early in the morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb where Jesus had been laid. She had come to anoint his body with oil as was the custom. Seeing that the stone had been moved and the body gone, she tells Peter and John, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they

have laid him.’ Peter and John run to the tomb. They see for themselves that she’s right, the body is gone.

But what happens next is really important. Peter and John return home... but not Mary... Mary stays... Mary stands weeping outside the tomb.... Mary is deeply grieving for her Lord and Master...

Remember, it was Mary Magdalene and the other women who stayed with Jesus while he suffered on the cross. It was Mary Magdalene and the other women who stayed until he died. And now her Lord has disappeared and she’s the one who stays... weeping outside the tomb... It is only *in the midst of her grief and pain that she sees something*. In the midst of her grief and pain she sees things that the others don’t see.

First she sees two angels in white... they ask her “Why are you weeping?”... Then she turns around, and again she sees something... She thinks it’s the gardener...and again there’s the same question... “Woman, why are you weeping?”

In the midst of her deep grief, something earthshaking is being revealed to her... Jesus, her Lord is alive and standing there talking with her... He knows her and he is giving her instructions...

Mary is the first disciple to witness the Resurrection.

It's so important for us to realize that it was not in spite of her deep grief that she encountered Jesus...

it was on account of her ability to stay present with the moments of deep pain and grief. On account of her ability to stay present, she saw things that others did not see.

We all have some important things to learn from this story.

*Are we able to stay present with the moments of deep pain and sorrow in our own lives?*

It's not easy is it? We live in a society that tells you that you should avoid pain and sorrow at all costs. We need to be able to help and encourage one another to stay with those moments...we need help to move through those moments of pain rather than trying to avoid or minimize them.

*Similarly, are we able to stay present with the deep pain and sorrow of the world? That's what the cross is all about... staying present with the deep pain and sorrow of the world...*

Again, it's not easy. We live in a world where the pain and sorrow of the world is fed to us in bite size news pieces. Someone in a newsroom somewhere decides

which pain and sorrow we should be aware of and which one we will ignore for now. The war in Ukraine is horrible and completely unnecessary. But it's only one of many sorrows right now. Here are some painful items that we are told to ignoring for now:

1) Due to Saudi Arabia's war on Yemen, 131,000 people have died due to lack of food or health services

2) On April 1<sup>st</sup>, the Taliban reneged on a promise to let girls attend Secondary School.

3) The US has just approved a sale of armaments and attack helicopters to Nigeria worth 1 billion dollars. Last year Nigerian soldiers opened fired on demonstrators who were protesting police brutality.

4) Uighur Muslims in China are being subjected to forced sterilization and deprogramming.

5) According to the Stephen Lewis foundation 4200 girls and women **each week** in Africa acquire HIV - most often due to rape

6) Here in Stratford, some people spend the cold nights sleeping under a tarp because there's no where else for them to go

7) The 401 is a major corridor for human trafficking - and through the internet our children and grandchildren are vulnerable

8) Here at one of our high schools this week a black teenage girl was physically attacked in the midst of a class that was discussing the problem of racism.

This is the pain and sorrow of the world - both near and far from home in Stratford.

It's not easy to hear. It's not easy to stay with all this pain and sorrow. But if we don't make an effort to be present with it, or at very least to acknowledge it, then we are like the disciples who ran away when things got tough and painful.

The thing about Holy Week and Easter Day is that the two things are intimately connected. Speaking truth to power and suffering for it is all part of the joy of New Life. The brutal violence and death of Good Friday is intimately connected to the joy and new life of Easter day. One doesn't exist without the other. If you want to go along with society and avoid the tough painful stuff then truthfully, it's going to be harder for you to see and fully experience the truth and sheer joy of Easter.

You're not going to experience true joy if you just skirt around the tough issues we live with. There's no point in putting tough issues in the wings off stage so that you can give Joy and celebration the limelight. If you do then the joy and celebration will only be superficial. We as Christians are not being called to live superficial lives.

The one thing about Jesus was that he was anything but superficial. He had no interest in just skimming the surface of human life... He had no interest in telling people to be happy and shiny. He was present with the tough issues of humanity just like Mary was present with the pain and suffering he eventually endured.

Here, in our part of the world, our remembrance of Holy Week and Easter comes in Spring. The joy we get when we see the snowdrops and crocuses popping up and offering happy blooms are part of the joy we have at this time of year.

But those blooms don't magically come out of nowhere. Those plants are new life that are being fed and nurtured by plants and animals that have died and are giving their life giving nutrients. New life coming out of death. Now the green blade riseth...

Each and every one of you have your own pain and sorrows that you carry. My prayer for you all this Easter Day is that you help one another to be present with them. Don't hide them or run away from them or ignore them. Talk about them and help one another bear the load. Take the time to stay with them and weep over them.

Then like Mary, you will see things that you were not expecting. You will see new life break forth like the dawn. You will be lifted up and be surprised by a joy that is not superficial - but a joy that is wide and deep as the ocean.

Jesus, my Lord is risen today. Alleluia!  
May his grace and peace be with us all.           Amen.