



Easter 2022

Lori Lampert - 04/17/2022

Throughout the Lenten Season, from Ash Wednesday until today, we have borne witness to the cross. We have watched and listened to the events that unfolded as Jesus, the Son of God, was forced to walk the *Via Dolorosa*, the way of sorrow.

We listened to the voices of the scoffers and the religious leaders as they manipulated circumstances to ensure Jesus' crucifixion. We stood with the bystanders and saw his pain, grateful that Simon of Cyrene was grabbed and forced to take the crossbeam from Jesus instead of us.

We watched as the soldiers nailed him to that same beam and lifted his tortured body before the loving eyes of his mother and the beloved disciple. As Jesus hangs there, struggling for each breath, he forgives what we deem unforgivable. He includes in his kingdom someone we would casually exclude. He creates a new family bound together in love.

And then, with the words "It is finished," Jesus dies. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus take him down, and with honor and dignity they lay him in a tomb. The stone is rolled into place. By the power of the Holy Spirit and the gift of our imagination, we are there.

Jesus has died. Nothing binds us more than a shared experience of death. And nothing transforms us more greatly, challenges us more directly—changes us more completely—than encountering the One who defeats this foe through the glory of the resurrection.

We are looking this morning at the shortest of the Gospel resurrection stories, the one found in the Gospel of Mark. It is direct and it is clear from beginning to end. The writer has one agenda—that you and I, the readers and hearers of this gospel, will know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. That he was dead and buried. That he is raised from the dead. And I invite you to let yourself be there, at the tomb, and experience Easter.

According to Mark, there were three women coming to the tomb that morning. These women are in profound grief. They have witnessed the brutal death of their beloved Jesus, and there was nothing they could do to stop it. They are deeply feeling the pain and confusion death brings.

They know the body of Jesus lies behind a large stone that was placed in front of the tomb. They do not know how they will move it. They know there are rumors that someone might steal the body. And they know this is the last gift they can give Jesus, coming this morning and honoring him with the ritual spices and anointing his broken body. He's been dead for three days, and yet their love and grief propel them forward. We are there.

In the last chapter, the last words of Mark's gospel, we read:

¹When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ²And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.

³They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.

⁶But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” ⁸So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

May God bless the reading and hearing of these words.

There are two endings to the gospel of Mark. Many scholars believe that verses 9-20 were added later, that this was the ending that Mark intended. And that seems so very strange to those of us who like stories to have happy endings, things tied up in a ribbon, a resolution of the conflict. There is no end to this story, it is not tied up. It can't be.

You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised. He is not here.

Boom. Mic drop.

The women were afraid. They were filled with terror and amazement. What will you do with these words? He has been raised? Wait...what?

If this is true, then:

- Everything you thought you knew about death has been changed. It does not have the final word. There is life now and life everlasting.
- The world as we think we have understood it—where evil wins and the people with the most wealth, the most political capital, the most power, the loudest voices and the stoutest whips—has been turned upside down. Love wins, and it will change the world.

I love how Park Renshaw writes:

“In the raising of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead, God showed us the world according to God. In Jesus Christ the world is now a new world.”

-Park Renshaw

What does that world look like? It looks like the life Jesus lived.

The world according to God—it is built on love. In it, we actively love God and love our neighbor. The meek are honored. Humility is a virtue, and we kneel in service to one another. This world, God’s world, is a place where our desire is to see people, all people, as Jesus sees them. Where everyone knows that having enough is enough, and having more than enough is a calling to be extravagantly generous.

In the new world, those who mourn are comforted. Peacemaking becomes a way of life, and things that divide us are overcome. We extend mercy and grace to one another as Jesus did to us. And we intentionally do the hard work of turning our enemies into our siblings until weapons have once again become tools for gardening the soil.

And guess what? You and I live in this new world. It is now. It is here. It has happened. We cannot remain silent or simply be bystanders. We understand the fear of the women and their initial reaction. Absolutely. When they have heard the most life-changing truth any of us will ever hear—of course there was amazement mixed with fear.

Easter is not a human response to the problem of human finitude, but rather it is God's action in response to the issue of injustice as witnessed in the crucifixion of Jesus. When this event comes upon us, when we have been encountered by the living Lord, raised from death at Easter, our world is rocked and we are forever changed. Like the women at the tomb, we can never go back the same way that we have come. No wonder that fear is a typical Easter emotion.

- William Willimon

But we know what they did. They would circle back and tell the story. They live and die right inside the story. They have encountered the living Lord. And their fear is replaced by love.

So you and I must tell this story. In word and deed. We must live as if we believe the world is upside down. We believe it is love that changes the world. And we have to get busy engaging in this world.

- Where the greatest force is not determined by weapons, but by love.
- Where the first response we have to injustice and oppression is to see all as children of God through eyes of love and work for change.
- Where we do not engage in hatred, bigotry, or labeling, but are the ones who offer a voice of love.
- When we are willing to walk into the pain of others and bring love.

- Where we are willing to sit with those we disagree with and hear their story through love.
- Where we tear down walls with words of reconciliation, forgiveness, and love.

The Easter story goes on and on and on. You and I, loved by God, carry it with us from this place, into the world that God loves. You can always be there, for Jesus—the Son of God—is always here.

You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised. He is not here.

Boom. Mic drop.

And it is in this world that the Table grows bigger and bigger until all find a place. All are welcome. Love keeps pulling up more chairs.

Let's celebrate this today with the sacrament of Holy Communion. This is a table set for us by Jesus Christ. This is the table where all are invited to come and feast. Everyone in this room is welcome here.