

2020 04 12 – Easter Hope

Matthew 28:1-10

On Friday, when we left Mary of Magdala and the other Mary, they were sitting facing the tomb. That afternoon, they had watched, looking on from a distance, as Jesus cried out with a loud voice and breathed his last. They had watched as Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea, took Jesus' body, wrapped it in linen cloth and laid in a tomb which he had hewn in the rock. They had watched as Joseph rolled a huge stone across the entrance of the tomb and went away. We don't know how long they sat there, facing the tomb. We can only imagine what they were feeling – the sadness, the loss, the grief, the fear, the uncertainty.

But at least they were able to be there at the death of their teacher, at least they were able to watch as his body was buried, at least they were able to grieve beside his tomb. We are living in a time when people are dying with no family at their side. We are living in a time when bodies are being stored in refrigerated trucks. We are living in a time when loved ones are in self-isolation and unable to hold a funeral or even visit a graveside. We are living in a time of great sadness, loss, grief, fear and uncertainty.

We know that eventually, the women left the tomb. They needed to go and find the others. They needed to go and get ready for their Sabbath. Saturday is the Jewish holy day, the day of rest. So, for a whole day, they could do nothing but wait.

Waiting, that's one of the hardest things isn't it? These days we wait in long, spread-out lines in the grocery store. We wait for our turn on the 811 line praying we won't need a test. We wait for our specific day to apply for government funding. We wait for each day's tally of new infections and deaths. We wait for the health authorities to tell us that we have finally reached the peak and are moving down the other side of this pandemic. Sometimes it feels like we do nothing but wait.

Mary of Magdala and the other Mary waited no longer than they had to. Even as Sunday, the first day of the week, was dawning they set out to inspect the tomb. No doubt, tears were still falling as they continued to grieve. No doubt, fear was still mounting as they wondered who would be the next to be arrested. As they drew near to the tomb, the women would have been surprised to see Roman guards standing at the entrance. The chief priests and Pharisees had asked Pilate, the Roman governor, to provide guards for the tomb. The temple authorities wanted to ensure that Jesus' disciples were unable to steal his body and fake his resurrection.

But as Mary of Magdala and the other Mary arrived at the tomb the world literally shifted under their feet. The ground began to shake and then an angel descended from heaven and rolled back the huge stone. The angel's appearance was like lightning, like a flash of bright light. This vision in white spoke to the women, reassuring them that they didn't need to be afraid. This bright light from heaven told them that Jesus had been raised, that he was no longer in the tomb. They were even invited in for a look. Then the angel gave

them their instructions, “go quickly and tell the disciples that Jesus has risen from the dead and now goes ahead of you to Galilee. You will see Jesus there.”

Where were the Roman guards you might ask... well they were so frightened that they lay on the ground, like dead men.

The women, on the other hand, hurried away to execute their task. They ran to carry the good news to the disciples. And as they left, their hearts were filled with awe and great joy! Awe, is of course, a feeling of reverence mixed with fear and wonder. These two Mary's were afraid. How could they not be with what they had experienced, what they had felt and heard and seen? But unlike the Roman guards, their fear had not paralyzed them.

Their fear, their awe had not paralyzed them because they had faith and their faith made it possible for them to hope. As they ran from the empty tomb, they allowed themselves to believe in the possibility of resurrection. As they ran towards the other disciples, they allowed themselves to believe in the possibility of new life. As those two women ran to share the good news, they allowed themselves to believe in the possibility that their teacher was still with them and they felt the stirrings of great joy.

In the midst of fear and uncertainty it is possible to have hope and even joy. Hope comes from faith, faith in the Holy Mystery, faith in the power of Love, faith in the goodness of God's creation, faith in the promise that we are not alone. Even in the midst of a global pandemic it is possible to have hope.

Hope comes from faith and is strengthened when we see glimpses of the holy in our lives. Yesterday, I listened on Facebook, as a woman in Vancouver sang an incredibly moving version of Ave Maria from her balcony while accompanied by a pianist three floors below. Every day we hear stories of people who are sending messages of love through chalk on sidewalks, signs on windows, bagpipes outside of care homes, and sports kits left on doorsteps. Those who can, continue to care for the homeless and feed the hungry. So I ask you... where have you seen love at work? Where have you found inspiration? Where have you experienced Easter hope?

Mary Magdala and the other Mary were amazed when Jesus suddenly stood before them and greeted them in the typical fashion of the day. They were even able to touch him, to embrace his feet. These days there isn't a lot of embracing going on, but we still get opportunities to experience the risen Christ. We still have moments when we can see and feel the loving presence of God. Even in the midst of one of the most troubling times that our planet has ever experienced, we are able to proclaim the promise of hope and peace and love. We are able to feel both awe and joy.

Pope Francis explained Easter Hope in this way. He said:

We proclaim the resurrection of Christ
when his light illuminates
the dark moments of our existence.

Jesus Christ is risen indeed!