

April 9, 2023 EASTER Rev. Katheryn McGinnis

Let us pray. Divine redeemer, bearer of life, open us to the wisdom of your Word today and enlighten us with your truth. Liberate us from all that distracts us and turns us from your path. Guide us and ground us in Christ's everlasting hope. Amen.

Our scripture this morning comes from the gospel of Matthew, chapter 28, verses 1 through 10. Listen now for the word of the lord.

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And suddenly there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." ⁸ So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

The word of the lord. **Thanks be to God.**

There's always something special about Easter morning. Even in the quiet moments of daybreak, even before worship begins, there is just something different.

The anticipation of easter creates an atmosphere that transcends our physical sanctuaries and worship spaces, and we feel it's presence. We feel easter.

We feel its joy, its fear, its grief, its hope, its exhaustion, its confusion, its energy. We feel it all because it's the only way we can understand it or experience it.

We will never understand resurrection. But we will always be able to feel it, and so, believe it.

To be able to feel Easter so readily, or rather recognize its anticipation, is a privilege we take for granted. There's something so special about Easter mornings because we know what is coming, we know the joy that awaits because we've seen it.

We're part of a tradition, thousands of years old, molded and formed by the power of Easter morning. Thus, were attuned to the world around that is about to change as the day breaks. We're attuned to how we respond and interact with the world around us that is about to change.

On that first Easter morning, those who were there did not have the same privilege. We live the first Easter morning through the perspective of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. They come to see the tomb. We don't know what they were thinking or their expectations. Did they come to grieve? Or just to be there?

Did the world feel different that morning in a way that they couldn't explain or understand?

We don't know what they thought or felt before they got there, but once they got to the tomb, there's an earthquake, and an angel appears and rolls back the stone to an empty tomb.

These events are so absurd, and extraordinary, and taking place all at once, so that the women know something is about to change. Something that mere humanity is not capable of. And the women, understandably, are afraid.

But the angel speaks good news: He is not here, for he has been raised. Come and see.

And though they are still afraid, they now have joy. And it's the adrenaline of both confused together that propels them to quickly leave to go to tell what they have seen. To preach the good news of the gospel for the very first time.

But along the way it is the risen Christ himself who intercepts them. Perhaps catches them out of breath as they ran to share the good news to anyone who would hear it. The women recognize him and go to him. Grab his feet and worship him. The first to worship the risen Christ, and again, they receive the charge to spread the good news of the gospel, this time from the gospel himself.

The gospel of Matthew's account of the resurrection is only 10 verses long, but it leaves you out of breath. It's vivid, passionate, and full of wonder. and you feel it all through the eyes of the two Marys.

It happens so quickly, with such excitement and urgency, that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary didn't have time to do anything but feel it. They didn't have time to think or understand, they just feel.

And it's in their place, that we are allowed just to feel.

We live in a world that clings so desperately to what we can know and understand, to some manmade construction of fact, and that is mostly a good thing. The journey to knowing, understanding, and discovering fact broadens our vision to see the beauty of the world, and have greater empathy and compassion for all who live in it. But it has its limits.

There are things about life, who we are, and the world we live in, that we will never understand because we did not create any of it. Our emotions are our link between what we know and what we don't.

We see, hear, touch, smell, taste, things we know. But what we feel is just what we feel. We don't always know what it is that we are feeling or where the emotions come from or why. They just are.

So, in world that so desperately needs to know everything, we aren't allowed to just feel. When Christ rises from the dead and God shows that even death is not the final word, that through resurrection God can make all things new, the only thing we can do is to feel.

The resurrection overwhelms our senses so that we know this is not of our own doing. This is wholly divine.

God's kingdom is not of this world but through resurrection it is breaking into our world. All we must do is feel it.

There are many reasons we can think of that explain why that tomb is empty that Easter morning. After the women leave, the guards tell everyone that the body is stolen. It's certainly more believable than resurrection. But ultimately, any reason that we think of that explains why the tomb was empty that Easter morning does not matter. Because the truth of resurrection is seen not in the empty tomb, but what comes next. The power of resurrection lies in how we are transformed by it.

And so, on this easter morning, what a gift it is to not stay at the empty tomb in confusion and doubt, unable to break free from the manmade constraints on what we think this world should be. But instead, to just feel it all, and then run with courage towards transformation.

Resurrection did not just happen thousands of years ago, resurrection happens each and every day. God's victory over death is not contained to the one time we physically die, but God's power to make all things new abides everywhere, even in the darkest corners where no light is found. Even there, resurrection awaits.

It makes us wonder how many times have we been so close to resurrection. Staring at that empty tomb, but unable to leave to see God overcome it and make it new.

In the gospel of Matthew, in all the gospels, really, Jesus' followers never seem to get it right. They misunderstand, they are afraid, they mess up, and they even betray him.

It's easy to chastise them, but perhaps it is truer to instead to see yourself within them. The easy failure of the disciples are an unrelenting assurance of God's love and grace.

It is a reminder that we do not always have to get it right to be Christ's disciples. God's ability and choice to work through us is not dependent on us at all – it's all God.

But on Easter, we're given a breath of fresh air. A new kind of hope for the type of disciples we can be. We experience Easter through the eyes of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. And unlike the disciples and Jesus' other followers, they get everything right.

They both began to follow Jesus back in Galilee and stayed with him. They were there when he was crucified. And after he died, they stayed with his body and were there when he was buried in the tomb. Then they honored the sabbath and rested.

When the sabbath was over they came back to the tomb. We know the rest. They felt fear and joy, saw the empty tomb, and ran with urgency and excitement to proclaim a message that they probably didn't understand, but knew to be true. And on the way they saw the risen lord himself.

The resurrection gives us a radical hope that anything, – anywhere – at any time can be made new. And Mary Magdalene and the other Mary show us exactly how to respond. With fear and joy and urgency and excitement. To just feel it all, and then, with faith and courage, share the good news.

The gift of Easter is to just be. To respond faithfully to resurrection is to simply be who we are and embrace how the resurrection makes us feel things in a way that overwhelms us, trusting that this is not of our own doing – it is wholly divine.

Whatever easter makes you feel... happy, sad, overwhelmed, confused, afraid ...the mystery and power of resurrection resides within it all. Our emotions are our link to what we don't understand. But in resurrection, they link us to what we do know. Death is not the final word. New life is about to spring forth here and now. If we only leave the tomb with all that we feel, and rejoice.

Christ is risen. Alleluia! Amen.