

Dwell in Christ and turn despair into hope.

Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24; John 20:1-18

As Mary stood at the entrance of the tomb crying, the angels said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” Mary believed that they had taken Jesus: her teacher, her guide, her mentor, the one whom she loved. And as she turned around, Jesus asked her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” It was in that moment that Mary was stricken by grief. She was clouded by this grief, until Jesus said her name, “Mary.” What a powerful moment. The veil of fear and grief was stilled. It was as if she was seeing him for the very first time.

One of the most powerful verses in this passage today is when Mary Magdalene then goes and announces to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord. Jesus has risen.” What is interesting about this account of Jesus’ resurrection according to the gospel writer John is that Mary came to the tomb first, and upon seeing that the stone in front of the tomb had been removed, she didn’t go in; instead she turned and ran immediately to the other disciples to tell them what had happened.

Simon Peter and the other disciple that Jesus loved then ran to see for themselves what Mary had spoken about, with Mary close behind. And upon reaching the tomb again, the disciple whom Jesus loved bent down, looked in and saw the linen cloths lying there. But it was Simon Peter – Peter, who’d denied ever knowing Jesus during the time of his arrest – was the first to actually enter the tomb. It took the faithfulness of Mary to discover what would become the Good News that we know. It took the love of the disciples to find the strength to go to that empty tomb, and it took the boldness of Peter to approach and then to comprehend the truth that was revealed.

We have all come here today like Mary, like Peter, like the beloved disciple. Like Christians for thousands seeking the truth. Karl Barth, a well-respected theologian, believes that this is the unspoken question that clings to our hearts and minds. He said:

“Is it true? Is it true that God lives and gives us life? Is it true that God not only established a routine – what we call ‘The Laws of Nature’...but that one day God broke the routine and somehow raised Jesus from the dead? Is it true that something so

extraordinary happened on that morning that we can only rebuild our lives on its foundation? Is it true?”¹

It was this question – what is the truth? – that led me to embark on my own journey in my Masters of Theological Studies. Wondering: is it true? For Mary, it was hearing her name spoken by Jesus that gave her the answer to this question. For Peter, it began in the discovery of the linen wrappings without Jesus there in the tomb. What was it for you? What has Jesus done in your life that has brought you here today to witness to the fact that Jesus Christ has risen? What has led you to believe that Jesus is indeed the way, the truth, and the light? The resurrection story sheds light on our doubt; leads to depth of knowing and believing. Easter is the celebration and acknowledgement of Jesus’ resurrection, and it is also about refusing to accept the limitations of the obvious.

This week, I saw a quote on social media that has stayed with me that I want to share with you now. It was written by Rev. Dr. Caleb J Lines. He writes:

“Easter isn’t about Jesus being literally resurrected to sit on the throne in heaven. Easter is about *becoming* the resurrection, so that Jesus lives on through our actions.”

Easter is about becoming the resurrection. A stone, a tomb, a person cannot contain the power of God and the love of Christ, and death is not the last word. Jesus is teaching us that in the end is our beginning. Our journey begins with Christ.

Now, in that scripture that we heard, the other thing that Jesus told Mary was not to hold on to him, but to let him go. This is not an easy thing for humans to do; we try to hold on to things that were never ours to keep. The love the disciples had for Jesus was not lost. His body was gone. The way they knew him on earth had changed. But Jesus is the Word of God made flesh and has now been transformed. Jesus is present to us, is known in the power of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus is the source of our hope. Jesus is the fabric that unites us and joins God and humanity together. So we are now the love of Christ lived in this world. So why do we keep trying to hold on to the past when our path lies ahead? When the path of faith is filled with possibility, promise, hope, acceptance, peace and love? How will we become the resurrection? How are we the living resurrection? I believe that our call is clear: we are called to be part of a radical movement of Christ. Where God is at the centre of all we do; where love is the action that is the foundation upon which we treat all people.

In *A Song of Faith*, the United Church’s most recent statement of faith, we actually confess “as a church that we have not always lived up to this vision of loving one another as Jesus has loved us.” We, the church, have at times in our history hurt people in our attempts to live out God’s call. Like the people who were there to witness Jesus’ arrest, his trial and crucifixion, we have

¹ Martin B. Copenhaver, *Feasting on the Word; Year A, Volume 2*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 370.

not followed Jesus' greatest commandment. At times along our journey of faith, we have betrayed, like Judas, the teachings of Jesus. We have denied, like Peter, knowing and being friends with Jesus. And at times we have lost our way. And Jesus forgives us. Jesus has called us, and we have been offered grace, acceptance, and unconditional love.

It's time for us to use all that God has given us. To see the face of Christ in the person sleeping on a bench in a park. To see the face of Christ in the person who is not mentally well. To value the people who have been tossed aside because they do not fit the world's image of a person we would expect to be a leader. To make space for the voices that have been silenced, and for the voices that challenge and speak the truth and call out injustice. To work on reconciliation with peoples that we have hurt as individuals and as communities. Like Mary, who proclaimed, "I have seen the Lord," we can no longer turn away from the brokenness of the world and all of Creation. Living the resurrection means working together as the body of Christ. To mend the broken-hearted. To embrace all people with kindness and love, and to be the change in the world that God longs to see.

Friends, as you leave this sanctuary today, this place of refuge, this place of discovery, of new life and a new beginning, go out in the hope of resurrection. Tell the stories boldly. Share your joy with those who are weeping, and dream of a world where hurts can be healed and where we will be the threads of a cloth that weaves the whole world together. Uniting us in a beautiful colour of our diversity, with a vision of a new life in Christ. Christ has risen. Hallelujah.