

Easter Sunday

Jeremiah 31:1-6; PSALM 118:1-2, 14-24; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 28:1-10

The Holy Gospel according to Matthew

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 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. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 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.”

So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Growing up, Easters were always spent with my dad's side of the family. My dad was one of five and had many, many cousins. It was time each year the whole extended family got together. We rented out the community hall in the small town where my grandma lived. There was always too much food and too much fun to be had. And It wasn't a true family gathering until Grandma's cream puffs reached the table.

I have many fond memories of Easter afternoons spent with my family. One year, though, that all changed. When I was a sophomore in high school, my grandma died a few weeks before Easter. The family, of course, all gathered together for the funeral and memorial.

But Easter was different that year. There was no trip to grandma's house, no gathering around a feast and sharing stories together. And in the years since...our Easter gatherings haven't continued. Over the past few years, I hadn't really spent too much time thinking about it. Even if they had continued, I probably would have missed all of them while I was in college and seminary.

But this year, as we've journeyed through a strange Holy Week together, I was reminded of another strange Easter.

What a Holy Week it has been my friends. The things we had been planning for and looking forward to, the patterns and routines we find comfort in, the rituals and traditions that guide and ground us have all been experienced quite differently this year. In fact, life itself is profoundly different, foreign even, in this time of physical and social separation.

In this time, we may indeed know the power of death more intimately than we have before. Living through the COVID-19 pandemic, death is every before us: the death of thousands of people a day, the death of jobs and businesses, the death of life as we know it.

The pain, trauma, and anguish of these deaths is something our own Savior took on himself. In his own suffering and crucifixion, Jesus took on the depth of our brokenness and pain. On Good Friday, Jesus breathed his last and died.

Early on Sunday morning, death was the reality for the disciples. Mary and Mary went to the tomb, the place of death, not looking for a last glimmer of hope, but to properly bury their beloved. The disciples didn't lock themselves away to share platitudes about how this was all going to be okay, but to grieve and mourn, still in shock about the events of the days before.

And this is where the resurrected Christ meets his beloved. Raised to new life, Jesus greets his friends exactly where they are. He doesn't scoff at their crying or scold them for not believing hard enough.

No, instead Jesus draws near. As the women leave the tomb with fear and great joy, Jesus shows up. He doesn't wait for a statement of faith or for the women to have it all figured out. In the midst of their mixed emotions, Jesus appears and brings new life. And as the faithful women embrace him, I imagine that Jesus embraces them too, offering words of comfort and peace.

Today, you might find that you are full of worry and fear. Or maybe you find that you are full of joy and gratitude. Perhaps, you're really somewhere in between the two extremes. In our own mixture of emotions, Jesus shows up for us, too.

The power of love that raised Jesus from the grave is still at work in the world. Yes, we are afraid, and stressed, and anxious about so much right now. And still God is with us and calling forth new life in the very midst of death.

Freed from the dominion of sin and death, we are freed for new and abundant life, not just for ourselves, but for all people and all creation.

The good news of the gospel is that the God who is crucified on the cross is the same God who finds us outside the empty tomb. This is our Easter story. Nothing can separate us from God's love, not even sin or death. God is with us, bringing new life and transforming us with love and grace.

For this we say Alleluia! Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!